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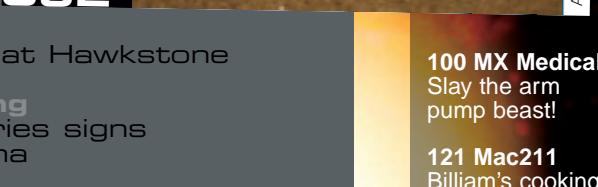
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FACTION

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COMMENT

SUPERCROSS IS the shop window for off-road racing. For the more educated among us the difference between SX, motocross, enduros, hare and hounds etc is crystal clear but to the non-fans out there – the people we need to get hooked if we're to expand this great dirty world of ours – it's all just men (and women) racing bikes on something other than Tarmac.

Indoors, outdoors, 25-minutes, three-hours – it all makes no difference. But what SX offers that the other disciplines don't, what makes it stand out from the crowd, is that it's sanitised. It doesn't matter if it rains. You don't have to be scared of going to the toilet. You don't have to sit in your car for an hour in a field before you can start the journey home. You don't have to queue for 20 minutes for an over-priced hotdog. Er, on second thoughts best just scrub that last point. But cheap digs at cheap meat apart, it's this mass appeal – this potential to grab the imagination of the general public, to turn them on to dirt bikes – that makes getting it right so important.

The recent Crusty Demons Unleash Hell tour – while not exactly racing – is an example of how to get it right. Extensive pre-event publicity aimed not just at off-road fans but at a more mainstream audience ensured they flogged loads of tickets and bums on seats makes for a great atmosphere. And they sold so many tickets that it can't have been a solely off-road audience – this was Joe Public turning out to watch men on dirt bikes purely for entertainment value. It could just have easily been monster trucks. Or, for the amount of choreography that went into the dress rehearsal, Disney on Ice. And an awesome show ensured that when they tour Britain again people will come back for more – and tell their friends.

But before the Crusty hit these shores how many people thought they'd want to spend over two hours watching a troop of freestylers back-flipping through pyrotechnics to a pumping punk soundtrack? Or even knew such a thing existed? Do you see my point? The promoters have actually created a demand for something that wasn't even a blip on the general public's radar before they rolled up.

I've been to three of the four rounds of the latest British SX championship and – for me at least – it's not tapping into the potential that the Crusty Demons have nailed right between the eyes. Don't get me wrong – I've got loads of admiration for the way Future West have repeatedly returned to the UK and risked a whole lot of moolah to ensure we have a national supercross series. And DBR's been proud to support them since day one when they brought Jeremy McGrath to Sheffield. But despite sourcing some of the best venues in the country the recipe just doesn't quite do it for me.

The final round at London's O2 Arena is a case in point. An awesome venue within an awesome catchment area, it could have been the sold-out jewel in the crown of British SX but it failed to shine. Opening the show to The Clash's London Calling was a great idea but a few dancers with a bog-standard routine didn't cut it for me. It may have kept the dirt bike faithful happy until the racing started but for any member of the public who wasn't a fan, who maybe saw the Crusty tour and fancied another dirt bike fix – or who maybe was just a regular at the O2 – it wasn't enough. Showbiz razzamatazz is now part and parcel of the public's expectations at supercross events and as such has become another element that has to be nailed.

I watched the races from a hospitality box and from my high vantage point it was clear that not enough tickets had been sold and that means no matter how good the racing, the atmosphere is going to be lacking. And if the atmosphere isn't there then it's just not an occasion that's going to drag the mainstream audience back the following year. Sure, the die-hard dirt bike fans will return year after year but it's getting the general public hooked that's the key. That's the only way the sport will ever grow in this country rather than treading water year after year. Like I said, I've got loads of respect for Future West – and I've got no easy answers (if I did I'd put on my own series) – but it just strikes me as an awesome opportunity to preach the gospel of dirt bikes to the masses missed.

Okay, on a much more positive note, isn't it a great time to be a DBR columnist! Hopefully I'm not about to put a curse on the fine upstanding gentlemen who ride hard and then write about it for DBR but from GC on page 13 through to Billy Mac at the back it's been a bloody good month and no mistake. Starting at the back and working forwards (appropriate given his International Grand Final performance), Billiam may not have quite got the results he wanted at Hawkstone but boy was he flying on the Monster CAS Honda. He lead both MX1 motos, the first after fighting his way to the front, the second after nailing a monster (!) holeshot. And even after getting caught napping at the start of the final race at one point he'd passed every MX1 man and all but Tommy Searle in the MX2 division. If Billy's started as he means to go on 2008 should prove to be a very happy hunting ground indeed for him.

The pre-season internationals have also gone well for this month's cover star Stephen Sword and second overall at Hawkstone is a great result for a man who's packed a career's worth of injuries into just a couple of years. Training with the legend that is Dave Thorpe combined with a great team in Molson Kawasaki and a deep-seated determination to get back to the top seems to be serving Swordy well – either that or it's domestic bliss with the lovely Jodie and an almost daily roast that's doing it for him!

But the best news of all this month for me has been Gordon Crocker's storming ninth at the opening round of the GNCC in Florida. Racing an unfamiliar course in an unfamiliar series on an unfamiliar bike meant Gordy was up against it before the race had even started. So to go top 10 and finish only five minutes off the podium at his first attempt really is a cracking result. The Crock Star's had a pretty rough time of it for far too long now and a switch in focus appears to be just what the doctor ordered. Onwards and upwards GC...

Sean



WIN! WIN! WIN!

→ Swordy swag up for grabs

HE'S THE most successful British small-bore rider of the noughties, a three-time national champion and one of our bestest, bestest bets for GP podiums this year – and one lucky reader is going to win a shirt that's come quite literally straight off the back of Stephen Sword!

Oh yes, Swordy has given us the zebra-print Fox jersey as featured on this month's cover and he's even signed it to prove its authenticity. And if you're in any doubt that it was actually worn by the flying Scot it's still splattered in mud and a quick nose test under the armpit reveals the faint – but unmistakable – bouquet of roast meat, tatties and something we believe are called 'neeps' plus the subtle aroma of freshly mown grass.

To be in with a chance of winning Swordy's shirt all we want to know is the team he's riding for this year.

Is it:

- A) Molson Kawasaki
- B) Swift Suzuki
- C) CAS Honda
- D) Cheney BSA

Think you know the answer? Okay, write it down on the back of a sealed envelope or postcard and send it to us at 'Swordy Swag', DBR, 12 Victoria Street, Morecambe LA4 4AG. Alternatively, if you've got access to the world wide web then hook up to www.dirtbikerider.com and follow the competition link.

The first correct answer drawn totally at random by the chef at our local carvery after the closing date of April 10 gets the shirt.

→ Windham wear must be won

WE LOVE No Fear! As we're basically cowards at heart being able to suck up to the super-hip clothing brand means we feel all brave and tough – that and the fact they've given us an awesome set of Kevin Windham kit to give away!

Windham's been a fixture on the AMA pro scene for just about as long as anyone can remember and his gutsy, never-say-die style has won him a legion of fans plus more than his share of races – including this year's Houston SX Main Event. And with performances like that who are we to criticise his recent choice of facial hair adornment? Heck, we're even tempted to grow a big ole moustache of our very own in tribute.

To stand a chance of winning Windham's No Fear jersey and jeans – a spare set he never got to wear at Anaheim 1 – all you need to do is tell us his nickname.

Is it:

- A) K-Dub
- B) V-Dub
- C) Yee-Ha
- D) YM-CA

When you think you know the answer write it down on the back of a postcard, stuck-down envelope or discarded Gillette M3 Power box and send it to us at 'Windham Wear', DBR, 12 Victoria Street, Morecambe LA4 4AG. Or you can enter at the click of a mouse by going to www.dirtbikerider.com and following the competition link.

The first correct answer drawn totally at random by a man dressed as a construction worker after the closing date of April 10 gets the jersey and jeans.

DIRTBIKE RIDER

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"Young man, there's no need to feel down"



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**Cover: Swordy jumps
out of the range of the
big game hunters
(rayarcher.com)**

**Contents: The Reverend
Jake Nicholls is bathed
in a holy light as he
fires his Swift Suzuki
around Hawkstone
(Sutty/GMC)**

WIN! WIN! WIN!

Relentless CTi custom braces up for grabs

YOU'D NEVER dream of diving into your local lido without your frank n' beans safely stored (and, let's be honest, displayed to their very best) in a pair of super slinky Speedos so why would anyone consider pounding the laps with their really rather vulnerable knees unprotected?

In the world of knee braces CTi are the undisputed daddies and we've teamed up with Technology in Motion to offer one very, very lucky reader a pair of Relentless CTi custom braces worth a whopping £1600.

And that's not all! The winner of our fabulous three-part competition will also win a training day for themselves and a bosom buddy (you'll need your own bikes and kit) with Rob Hooper's Relentless Suzuki team plus a case of 24 cans of the fabulous, fizzy energy drink.

Second prize is a training day for two with Hooper's heroes (again, bring your own bikes and clobber) plus a case of Relentless and the third-placed entry gets two tickets to a Maxxis British MX Championship round with hospitality courtesy of Rob plus a case of Relentless. On top of all that a further 10 runners up will get – yep, you guessed it – a case of Relentless!

And as an added bonus, DBR will cover the training day so the top two entrants will get to see their ugly mugs appearing in Britain's favourite dirt bike mag!

To be in with a chance of winning you need to know the correct answer to the last two months' questions and the correct answer to this month's question.

Q1: Complete the following slogan that can be found on every can of Relentless energy drink – No Half...

- A) Bad
- B) Measures
- C) Nelsons
- D) Wits

Think you know the answer? Okay, write it down on the back of a postcard or sealed envelope and send it – together with the answers to questions #1 and #2 plus your name, address and a daytime contact number – to us at 'CTi comp', DBR, 12 Victoria Street, Morecambe LA4 4AG. Alternatively, hook up to www.dirtbikerider.com and follow the competition link. Entries close on March 31 with the first correct entries drawn totally at random getting the swag.

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The From Here to Eternity re-enactment society had surprisingly few members

WATERSPORTS!

WE SHOULDN'T laugh – after all similar things have happened to us (an incident involving a TY80 and a duck pond circa 1978 springs to mind) – but, hold on, that's precisely the reason we're allowed to laugh. So while we've got every sympathy for Margate Beach Race competitor David Morgan, when Mark Proctor's shot dropped into the editorial in-box we, er, laughed. A lot! For more of Mark's images from the event check out www.markproctorphotography.biz



Chris, his parents and nurses had a great day

FUND-RAISER

THE COOKSTOWN club in association with the MCCNI ran a fund-raising meeting on their GP track at Desertmartin in support of Chris Esler who suffered a spinal injury while racing last season.

Over 300 riders turned out on a windy winter day to show their support – testimony to the popularity of this determined and charismatic young man. So far almost £20K has been raised by the many friends that Chris has made through the sport over the years.

FANTASY ISLAND

By Neil Drew

HIDING OFF the coast of France lies the UK's most southerly off-road scene on an island approximately five miles long by nine wide. As well as a keen trials fraternity, Jersey boasts perhaps the country's most scenic and hair-raising motocross track – a white-knuckle ride of a cliff top circuit.

With little to do on the island except picking daffodils, digging up spuds, milking cows and making butter, the good folk turn to sport for their kicks – and boy does sport flourish!

Despite the riders having to go to France for outside competition, Jersey's producing some amazing talent with one rider standing head and shoulders above the rest. Riding a bog-stock KX250F, Harry Bertram sets a perilous pace – but with very few expeditions to mainland Britain the 19-year-old stands little chance of getting noticed.

In order to prevent the lads from getting bored with the one track the racing on Jersey is split between the purpose-built motocross circuit and one of the many beaches that surround the island.

It's still quite a ways off but anyone who fancies sampling island life – and pitting their skills against the local hot shots – should sign up for a two-day event on September 20-21. The folk are friendly, helpful and welcoming and the burger van produces gourmet cuisine but, a word of advice, the smaller your van the better as the roads are lined with walls made of granite and are narrower than DEFRA's off-road policies. For more info hook up to www.jerseymotorsport.com

GORDON CROCKARD

TOP DOG!

THE BEEMER AIN'T READY IN TIME SO GORDY CRACKS TOP 10 AT THE OPENING GNCC ROUND ON A HURRIEDLY HUSTLED UP HUSKY

WORDS BY GORDON CROCKARD PHOTO BY JONTY EDMUNDS

I'M IN America the day after my first GNCC race and my stiff little fingers are not co-operating with my orders to type this out for y'all. This time last week I was sat on the plane coming over for the first time since last October and was fairly apprehensive about what I was going to try and achieve in the weeks ahead.

I'm on a contract to race for the BMW factory team in the GNCC series and at this point in time the BMW race bikes aren't complete for competition. So for now the temporary solution is to race on Husqvarnas until BMW are in a position to launch their 450 bike into the American market. BMW own Husqvarna so that's how we're able to use this option.

For me I'm pumped to be on the line and given the opportunity to chase the championship as for a while we weren't going to be contesting the opening rounds due to the delay with the race bikes from BMW. I mean I've got a lot of development to do on myself as an off-road racer with the transition to dodging trees from my current career background of motocross. So being in the races is a vital part of me becoming a contender.

When I arrived into Cincinnati last Wednesday I had my mate Graham – aka staff – with me as he is also employed by BMW. We hadn't even seen a Husqvarna never mind ridden, tested or raced one so time was the most valuable thing to us and in terms of how much of it we had and what we wanted to achieve we were paupers!

You see when I got told that we wouldn't be on the startline for the first few rounds I objected heavily and pushed hard for a solution to be found.

Thankfully the team and all the background decision makers concerned were able to come to an agreement that we could ride Huskys for the meantime but this decision was only made last Friday. That gave exactly 10 days to decide on four-stroke or two-stroke, order bikes, order spare parts, get them sent and delivered, drive 16-odd hours south to Florida, ride them, test them, race prepare them and enter the race confident we're not going to look like a bunch of fools. We also had to

get large fuel tanks organised, race gear printed in Husqvarna colours, paddock clothing made and race trucks stickered up with Husky logos. Honestly, it has been crazy.

Scott Summers is the team manager and owner. I counted three nights he didn't actually go to sleep. He's a majorly hands on guy and works on the bikes himself to be sure all is as he believes it should be. Scott has nine GNCC titles to his name so he knows what he's doing and you can't buy the experience he has earned over his 20-year professional racing career.

As I write this round two is in just four days time. Yesterday's race was on a Tuesday because here in the States it's Daytona Bike Week and there are many different disciplines of motorcycling covered so Tuesday is when they run the GNCC. Florida is a tough race. It's deep sand and hot so a hard race to recover quickly from.

At the opening round I finished ninth and it was my goal to be in the top 10 so with everything taken into consideration I think we as a team did excellent. Round two will be hard but nowhere near as tough as round one I expect. For instance, the bikes are bog-standard out-of-the-crates 450 TXC Husqvarnas and the sand whoops for three hours in hot weather were seriously hard work for a ginger fella from Newtowndale. Florida is the only race which is sand so for round two it will be more traditional terrain with dirt, roots, ruts and bumps and I'm sure the stock bike won't restrict me to the extent it did in the Florida sand. I hope!

Not much other craic really you'd find interesting that I've been doing. I did race the London SX last week and I'd like to thank PAR and the Greedy's for the use of their 450 Honda for that. I also did the first BEC round on a Gas Gas the day after and finished sixth so thanks to Shirty and the Diss club for making it all happen, I thoroughly enjoyed it – especially the banter I had riding with Euan McConnell all day. You're a header wee man!

Okay, gotta wheelie now so cheers for reading. See ya...



Alex Snow dominates the
U21s with a pair of race wins



SILVER SURFERS!

Smith, Snow and Kane on the crest of a wave

Words and photo by Toby Fuller

THE 2008 domestic motocross season fires into action at Little Silver, Devon, for the opening round of the British Open, U21s and Ladies' championships. After a late venue change (it was originally scheduled for Matchams) the fast hillside circuit's a little one-lined making passing tough.

A good start's important and for the first encounter of the season in the Open class it's Bryan MacKenzie who sets the early pace, closely followed by PAR Honda new boys Jordan Rose and Ray Rowson with Pioneer Emberton Yamaha new recruit Wayne Smith close in tow. Rose pulls out after four laps with bike failure leaving the leading trio to battle it out and Rowson and Smith slip past MacKenzie to finish in that order.

Race two and the flying MacKenzie gates well again but has Smith and Rowson for company. Both nail MacKenzie on the same lap and this time Smith takes the win from Rowson and a fast-closing Mark Hucklebridge in third. Smith edges the overall win on the last race verdict.

With Rowson – who dominated the U21s in '07 – moving up a class for '08 it looks like the U21 title could be anyone's this season. Consistency wins championships and it's KTM UK rider Alex Snow who dominates the day right from the off in qualifying to take a double race win, the first narrowly from Shane Carless and the second from Kristian Whatley.

Other notables on the day are Joe Dark, Ashley Greedy, David Games and Josh Waterman.

Bring on the ladies and it's the super-fast Suso Suzuki rider Natalie Kane who romps away with two race wins, the latter by a cool two minutes from Louise Williams and Hannah McCleod.

IT WAS that time again, to pack the kitbag and the passport and head to the airport. I was flying down to Spain for Kawasaki's '08 launch and I landed at Girona Airport late in the evening, jumped in a cab and went straight to the hotel. Ryan was already there along with Ray Archer and some guys from Kawasaki.

We had four days scheduled for photos and press at the track but we ended up getting it done in three. It was a cool few days – we got some great pics and a lot of video footage. I also got some good riding in too and it was the first time that the whole team was together. Both the other Kawasaki GP teams – KRT and GPKR – were also there so it was just like one big green happy family.

I stayed over that week and travelled straight to the race in Valence. The weather there was awesome, all the other years I have been it has always been cold and snowing. I was excited about racing again and even though it was a mixed race it was a good warm up before the season gets properly under way. The whole weekend went good and I took time to ease my way back into race mode. When you haven't raced for a while everything seems to happen very quickly around you. I finished the day on the podium so I was obviously happy with that. It just felt great to be racing again and to be part of the team.

You realise the things you miss when you've been out for so long. Like being roosted by 450s all weekend – my chest and arms looked like I was hit with a paintball gun about a thousand times. Battle scars, you have to love them. Oh, I almost forgot to mention that I nearly ran over a crazy photographer in practice – Sutty, you got a bit too close for comfort that lap.

After the race Jodie and I steadily made our way to the airport as our flight was early Monday morning. We landed at Heathrow at 8am and were home just over an hour later so that was

STEPHEN SWORD

DOWN TO BUSINESS

SWORDY GETS HIS SEASON SWINGING WITH A SPANISH PHOTOSHOOT FOLLOWED BY A PAIR OF INTERNATIONAL SHAKEDOWN RIDES

WORDS BY STEVIE SWORD PHOTO BY RAYARCHER.COM

pretty sweet. Later that morning I met TC and Aaron just off the M3 to pick up my kit. They had both been away for a couple of weeks in the camper so I loaded most of my stuff in there so I didn't have to drag it all back on the plane.

It was a quick pit stop as the lads were keen to get on back home. TC tried his luck to get some diesel money out of me but there was no chance of that happening. You're still in debt to me TC – how many people do you know who would clean up their mate's sick for them? Had to mention that one again, sorry. I still tell that story to everyone when they order chicken chow mien. Speaking of food, a few people ripped into me when I mentioned that I like my roast dinners in my last column. Well we have them on a Monday now that the racing has started!

After the Valence race I spent the week preparing for the Hawkstone International and I got in some sand riding as the past week was all hardpack tracks. We arrived at Hawkstone on Saturday afternoon with the sun shining and the track looking superb. Probably the best condition I have seen it in for a while. The day again went pretty well and I had three strong rides to end up second overall. My starts are what let me down – it was a concrete pad so the chances of spinning up were high. Canada Heights is the only other track that has the concrete start so I'll be making sure I'm ready for that.

I feel as though my progress is good – I feel strong mentally and physically and I'm looking forward to the whole season ahead. There's still a few more weeks to go before the first GP and we have the first British at Donington before then. I haven't raced at Donington yet but was there watching when they held the GP.

That pretty much raps up another month, I'm just about to fire the lawn mower up and cut the grass. Yeah, I know I'm going to be ripped into about that this month. Am I bothered?





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LADIES FIRST!

DUBLIN GETS ITS GP AND MX GETS SOME POSITIVE PRIME-TIME PUBLICITY BUT IT'S NATALIE KANE WHO SCORES THE BIGGEST VICTORY FOR IRELAND THIS MONTH

IT'S OFFICIAL – the 2008 Grand Prix of Ireland is GO! Trevor Callaghan from the MCUI confirmed that a three-year deal has been penned and inked with Youthstream securing Ireland's place on the GP calendar until at least 2010.

Ferry House is the venue, situated just 25 miles from Dublin Airport. This modern complex is used to providing hospitality and catering for many thousands of punters over the years. Previously famous for horse racing events, Ferry House has all the required facilities in place to bring an Irish MX GP into the future with grandstands, hard-standing parking and first class hospitality. World motocross is heading the way of AMA supercross and gone be the days that the public would pay good money to stand knee-deep in mud or pay to get towed out of fields after the event in the name of 'tradition'.

In terms of hotels and entertainment, Dublin is up there with the key cities in Europe and I've no doubt Ferry House will provide that legendary Irish hospitality to our visitors and the Irish GP will be well supported by both diehard fans and the general public in, er, general.

The traditional Mad March Hare Motocross was run at Donamanagh due to the fact that the much-loved Ballykelly circuit has closed down – much to the detriment of the sport in Northern Ireland. However, that is another story and one which would take up the rest of this month's magazine if I were to get into a rant going over why and how our sport lost such a fantastic facility.

Anyway, back to the subject in hand. The March Hare continued to serve up what we expect from the pre-season opener – new faces, big crashes and an equal amount of surprises. Honda-mounted teenager Gary Gibson stormed to the first win of 2008 after grabbing the holeshot and recording the fastest lap of the day on a technical circuit. A second holeshot in race two was short-lived as Gary crashed his way down the leaderboard – still, a win could not keep the smile from his face all day.

After limping home in moto one

Dave Gorman spanked all-comers in race two on his two-smoker AJ Elite KTM. Drew Goudy seems to have recaptured the fun element of the sport and it showed, the former youth star is looking every bit a potential contender for the quarter-litre championships this season.

When all was said and done it was Mike Sinton who stepped onto the top step of the podium, shadowed by Goudy in the role of bridesmaid with Gibson in third. Sinton, who crashed hard in qualification, rode to 2-3 results without pushing the boat out. "I just rode the track as fast as possible without taking chances – a lot of riders were crashing and could have got hurt here today," reckoned the Irish #2.

Just south of the border, the North Dublin Club ran their first event of the year at Gormanstown which is pretty much an all-weather track beside the beach with some spectacular jumps. Goudy continued his return to

form by taking a win in race one before retiring from the rest of the day's proceedings. GOMX/ Mulligan Contractor Yamaha's 17-year-old rider Thomas O'Grady regrouped to win the final two races of the day after retiring with mechanical issues in race one. But it was the smooth consistency of Stefan Byrne that put the Four-Stroke Racing rider on the top step of the podium at the end of the day.

Natalie Kane is warming up for the forthcoming Women's World Cup and the fast lass made her intentions known as she blitzed qualification at the opening round of the ACU British ladies' series by some 12 seconds. Motovision Suzuki-mounted Natalie won both motos convincingly, taking her second victory of the day with over a two-minute margin.

In the U21 series it was less than a good start for the Irish contingent. Graeme Irwin didn't make the startline due to a mid-week injury and Pioneer Yamaha's Robert Hamilton crashed out of race one but got an 11th place for his efforts second time out when he recorded some excellent lap times. Hammy, still lacking in bike time, is recovering well from a knee operation which robbed him of the entire '07 season. His trademark lightning starts should see him back at the front before long.

Moto One Suzuki rider Wayne Garrett showed promise in the Open class with an 8-16 card. Wayne mixed it in good company in race one, showing just how important a start is at this level of racing. And David McCamley enjoyed his first trip across the pond. Although he just missed out in qualification, he redeemed himself by winning both support races in fine style.

Easter and the opening Ulster championship round is just around the corner which will also be held at the Donamanagh venue. Good as the track is, the fact remains the two-day Easter Ulster MX1/MX2 event was always one of the best spectator supported events of the year and the Tinkerville or Seaford tracks would have been the more 'commercial' choice. Okay, the tracks are not sandy but both have run

successful events in less than perfect race conditions.

The recently televised Insight programme on the Northern Ireland Events Company was actually a positive advertisement for motocross in this country. I was worried that motorcycling in general and MX in particular would have been the scapegoat that was perceived to have been the cause of the downfall of the NIEC. But during the 30-minute prime-time programme not one detrimental comment was made by anyone interviewed about our sport. The government ministers acknowledged that over 20 million people worldwide would have watched this "spectacular sport" and comments were made about just how professional riders have to be to perform at this level.

See you at the races...

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JONTY'S BOX

WORDS AND PHOTO BY JONTY EDMUNDS

ROLE MODELS

THEY'RE BOTH OFF-ROAD GODS AND THE VERY BEST AT WHAT THEY DO BUT DAVID KNIGHT AND TRAVIS PASTRANA SHARE MORE THAN JUST SUPREME TWO-WHEELED SKILLS...

"COME ON Knighter you big sissy, let's get it on..." It's not every day a rider publicly calls David Knight a big sissy. Standing well over six feet tall and with a physique that's more international rugby player than international six days enduro, Knight is a strapping lad. He's also the world's best extreme enduro rider and as such has earned himself a reputation as being as tough as they come out on the race track. So who'd dare to call Knight a sissy?

It may not surprise you to learn that the rider who called DK 'a big sissy' at the opening round of the US GNCC series wasn't any of his XC1 Pro class rivals, nor a disgruntled lapper that had been made to eat dirt after Knight had 'moved him aside' on his way past. No, it was FMX legend Travis Pastrana – yep, the one and only Travis Pastrana.

Just under one hour into the opening round of the US GNCC series, having re-joined the race after stopping to re-fuel his #199 Suzuki, Travis Pastrana blazed past a stationary David Knight, turned his head to the right and at the top of his voice threw down the gauntlet to his friend. He knew it wouldn't be long before his time as race leader would be up but in true Pastrana style he couldn't help himself...

A few days before the race Pastrana, walking through the paddock minding his own business while eating a small tub of ice cream, stopped by the KTM semi to say hi to his Erzberg buddy Knight. Within minutes the pair were tearing strips off one another as TP tried to wind Knight up before their first confrontation in almost two years.

"You've got no chance of beating me," stated Knight, reminding Travis that on every other occasion the two had competed against one another he'd been the one to come out on top. "Yeah but I drive rally cars for a living now, if you don't beat me you'll never be able to live it down." And so it went on.

Dig after dig, light-hearted put-down after light-hearted put-down.

As two of the biggest names in off-road motorcycle racing, Pastrana and Knight are more alike than many realise. Born in completely different parts of the world, from completely different upbringings and specialists in very different styles of motorcycle racing, both are exceptionally talented, popular and as well as both being huge fans of car rallying are just about as good as sporting role models come.

It's their personalities – the way in which they'll make time to speak to almost anyone, are always smiling and approachable and never seemingly too serious about what they're doing – that unites them. Single-minded in their approach to being the best they can be, what you

see is not sportsmen so highly strung that they can't find time for others, instead they're two 'normal' folk that are well aware that others take as much pleasure from watching them compete and win as they do from competing and winning themselves.

The opening round of the US GNCC series is arguably the biggest race of the year for Knighter. The one GNCC event that attracts more media coverage than any other, it's also there that all riders find out if their months of winter training have been to good effect. For Pastrana, the now part-time 'just for fun' motorcycle racer, a good result wouldn't change much but the way both riders approached the race was incredibly similar – positively, optimistically, seriously and with a smile on their faces.



TRAVIS SNAPPED IN FLORIDA IN A RARE SEMI-SERIOUS MOMENT

One thing that both Pastrana and Knight aren't is what is commonly referred to in this industry as 'rock stars' – riders that think they're a level above all others and act as if they ought to be treated better than royalty.

What was refreshing about Knight and Pastrana's friendly rivalry at The Triton GNCC was that it proved that no matter how popular, successful or well paid you are, you don't have to have an attitude. You can be every bit as focused about winning, work harder than any other rider and believe in yourself 100 per cent but as both DK and TP showed you can still enjoy what you do and have some fun.

The world of off-road motorcycle racing needs more riders like Knighter and Pastrana...

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TENACIOUS S

This'll make you laugh – maybe! When I first started riding in 2005 I had a '01 CR125 but because I was at school and mum and dad didn't really want to cough up the dollar for me to start racing I had to sell it and 'think about what I really wanted to do'. The easy answer was riding for a living but I never told them that because I knew they'd go mad!

Anyway, after three years of saving up pennies I managed to scrape together enough money to get another bike so I went to my mate's dad's bike garage and saw a '99 KTM SX125. My god this bike was in cracking condition and was only used as a field bike before. To cut a long story short after some haggling and a bit of bum-licking I managed to get it down from £1400 to £1100 so I could buy some kit (and mouthwash? – SL) as well.

I was over the moon and now five months down the line I'm just as good as some of the boys my mate Max races against. Even better I got a job and saved up enough to get an old transporter which I've just spent 200 quid on getting though the MOT. The next step is I'm giving up the day job and training every day. Next September I hope to go to Stefan Everts' training school in Spain – that's if he decides to drop his stupid costs (sorry Stefan if you're reading this)!

Motocross is the best thing I've ever taken up and the fact it's come from my own pocket makes it even better. Yeah, I may not have the dog's b*****s of a bike or kit but all I know is I'd rather live off motocross than a nine to five, Monday to Friday job and if there's anyone out there who agrees and fancies chucking me some sponsorship then come and watch me ride – you won't be disappointed!

Sam, Devon

We've got to admire your terrier-like tenacity Sam even if your spelling – before we tweaked it for publication – made our will to live weaker than a can of Tesco value lager. Any prospective sponsors can get in touch with Sam through the regular Rant address and we'll kick off his support package with a set of full-factory footwear...

HEY JOE!

I'm Joe, I'm 13 and I've been riding for about two years now. My local track is Mallory Park which I go to nearly every Sunday but I was reading in T+MX that it's going to be changed to a GP track. What I want to know is will kids be able to go on it still?

Joe, via email

Work's already under way on the track for the British GP but fear not young Joe, all the improvements will be done in sections so the very worst-case scenario is you'll have to find somewhere else to practice for the three weeks leading up to the event on June 1. After that you'll be able to practice on virtually the full GP circuit with only the hardest sections bypassed. Next time you're there ask for the latest news.

HEADCASE

I have been scratching my head until it's starting to fall out! My problem is I'm looking for some ECC graphics for my '04 RM250 – I've searched on the net for hours but can't find any for my bike. I hope that you can help me with this with all your contacts – I think N-Style made them.

Daz, North Wales

Your head starting to fall out can never be a good thing so we fired off an email to N-Style importer Doc Wobbly. The good news is that the graphics are indeed N-Style, the bad news is it looks like they're no longer available. Wobs reckons your best bet is to contact ECC in the States and see if they've got some old decals in stock – they may also stock some strong sticky tape-type product to help with the head problem. Good luck...

GO PRO!

I love MX and the only thing I think about is MX. I would really like to race professionally when I'm older but I don't know how to start off so I can do that. I have a KX125 and would love to start racing. I'm in year nine and I'm choosing my options at school but I don't know if there's anything I should take that would help me out with MX in the future.

Jake, Norfolk

If you want to turn professional then you need to get yourself into some of the schoolboy national championships – check out Rage this month for details of the different series that take place – and get yourself noticed. As for school options, you're much better off thinking of what you'll need to get a good job if you don't make it as an MX pro. Even Max Anstie, with a KTM factory ride, is making sure his school work doesn't suffer as he works his way up the racing ladder.

FMX DIY!

Me and the mates – that's Johna and my bro Ben – have built our own little freestyle ramp. Well, to be honest, Johna and Ben did most of the work as I'm completely useless with tools – my dad doesn't even let me fit my own bars!

We got hold of some plans and built it all up at a friend's engineering firm. At first we made the angle of the ramp a little too steep so had to take a few feet off the top to even it out. We've added a tow bar and wheels which are quick to remove so all we do is drive it to our test pad, whap the wheels off and start hitting it. It should be good for around 60 foot, piece of cake!

We're hoping in the next few months we can get enough practice in and start learning some tricks. We're also looking into putting the ramps into production for the public to buy or rent.

We tried the ramp for the first time yesterday at a track we rent and it was awesome. We've never jumped ramps before but it was wicked and we can't wait to get out on it again. Can I say a big thanks to my dad for repairing my bike afterwards as I'd bent the subframe, flat-spotted my wheels and blown my fork seals trying the ramp. Also thanks to Peachy for letting us use his unit to build the ramp.

Jay, Johna and Ben

We remember watching John Pearson pulling back-flips off what looked more like a door leant up against a pile of rubbish than a proper ramp on some wasteland near Wigan so you've already got a head start on the Croston Nutter...



The Sierra Sapphire
was desperate to get its picture in DBR

Ready to Ruuuumble!

Training, testing, training some more, testing some more – we call it the off-season but the reality is the world's top MX riders spend most of the winter working hard to make sure it's all systems go when the gate drops on the first GP of the year. The 2008 season kicks off on April 6 at Valkenswaard in Holland and in Tommy Searle we'll have our best chance of a world title since Jamie Dobb stuck it to 'em during that epic '01 season...

Photo: Ray Archer





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AN IMPASSIONED PLEA...

WITH NAMUR AND FOXHILL BOTH CRUELLY STRUCK FROM THIS YEAR'S GP CALENDAR, DIRTBIKERIDER.COM'S MONDAY MORNING BLOGGER STATES A HEARTFELT CASE FOR THE GOOD OLD DAYS OF REAL MEN RACING REAL TRACKS

Words by Pondo Photo by Jack Burnicle

When I was a boy – before the internet, satellite TV and live webcasts – the only way you could find out about what was happening in the world championships outside this Sceptred Isle was through the printed media.

Every week I'd devour reports of hard-drinking, hard-living ironmen wrestling ill-handling, over-powered bikes on tracks around the globe. The battlefields on which the wars were fought reads like a list of brooding monuments to the off-road stars of yesteryear – Carlsbad, Gaildorf, Villars-Sous-Ecot, Farleigh Castle, Hawkstone Park. And the most evocative of them all – the Citadel of Namur.

They all had their own faults but each and every one was individual with its own special traits. But from year to year it seems these great arenas are slowly disappearing from the map with challenging natural terrain being sacrificed for a more TV-friendly environment.

The typical modern circuit is not a bad venue for a motocross race with a compact layout and spectacular jumps and the riders seem perfectly happy with them. But it seems a lot of modern tracks lack charisma and sparkle – good venues but not great venues. Time was, I can remember, when the spectators could get right up to the fencing against the track, wave their flags, blow their air horns and scream themselves hoarse – it almost felt like you were a participant, an active part of the race. The riders would be out of your view for a long time but that only heightened your expectation and excitement – when you saw the arms waving further down the track that's when you knew they were just about to reappear.

Change is a necessary and unavoidable aspect of every sport – without change all you get is dangerous stagnation. But it seems that the changes being made to promote and encourage growth of TV coverage are coming at the expense of the fan at the track. With the layouts becoming increasingly compact, the amount of acreage of fencing a fan can blow an airhorn over is shrinking.

The nature of the tracks is also changing with TV-friendly jumps being valued more highly than a sweeping berm or a whooped-out straight or even a good old-fashioned, nasty off-camber section. The spectacle is being melted down as a result. Your average finish-line tabletop is impressive – the first time you see someone clear it – but the novelty rapidly wears off and clearing a big jump can only favour the brave over the more technically gifted.

More importantly, it's no challenge to a GP competitor. Schoolboys on 85s were clearing the finish line tabletop at Donington the day after the British GP – it would have been far more of a spectacle to see them wheelying through a set of rough sand whoops or power sliding, feet-up, around a quick blue-groove sweeper.

The shame of it is that it's so unnecessary. Motocross used to regularly occupy prime-time mainstream coverage – even as recently as 1987 the BBC was showing British championship rounds on Grandstand on a Saturday afternoon. Maybe they couldn't cover the whole circuit but limited coverage of an entertaining race is surely better value than watching every turn of a boring race. And do we want to be discouraging live attendance?

Football has a large and vocal section of supporters who want the traditional 3pm Saturday kick-off preserved against the wishes of the TV executives who'd like the matches spread out so they can show more of them live. The FA refuses to allow live coverage of any of the three o'clock matches because they know they need to keep attendance levels healthy. Is it possible that shaping motocross tracks on an entirely television-orientated basis could impact live attendance figures?

If the flat, lifeless atmosphere of the Donington MXGP is any indication, I fear that it could be entirely possible. Atmosphere is such a key part of a live event – without it you might literally be better off staying at home.

What we need are tracks with character – grands prix at Foxhill had it, so did Hawkstone and very definitely Namur. Even Matterley Basin had it in bucketloads, proof that a TV-friendly circuit can be a great amphitheatre for the motocross faithful. Gareth Hockey knows what he needs to do in order to create a new home for the British Grand Prix – only time will tell whether he's allowed to build that home but there'll be a vast horde of fans remembering the roar of the crowd as the pack charged into the valley at Foxhill and praying that they feel the same tingle as the hairs rise on the back of their neck when the gate drops for moto one at Mallory Park...



*Bloody trees get in the way
of the TV cameras!*



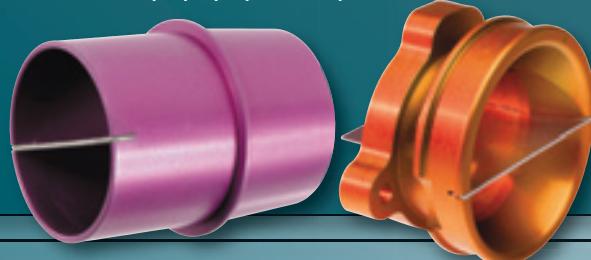
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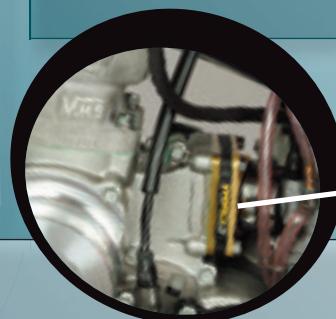
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LAST CHA SALOON!

IT'S NOW OR NEVER FOR JOSH COPPINS AS HE AIMS TO TAKE THE MX1 TITLE AWAY FROM STEVE RAMON WHILE DOWN IN MX2 ANTONIO CAIROLI'S GOING TO HAVE TO BE SUPER-SHARP TO REPEL KTM'S TWO-FISTED ATTACK

Words and photos by Alex Hodgkinson

At the start of last year Josh Coppins told me he intended to call time on his GP career at the end of 2008. When I asked him a couple of weeks back if his 2007 defeat had put his plans back a year, the Kiwi – 31 by the time you read this – answered in the negative. In other words, it's now or never!

Time does not stand still and it's only a few years back that Josh was one of the young challengers to the old masters Everts and Smets. This year he is the third oldest guy in the race with only veterans Mike Brown and Chicco Chiodi older. A generation switch has arrived and, as Josh acknowledges, "they're getting closer every year".

Early season results means little in a sport where it is physically impossible to maintain peak form for the full six months of the championship season but Coppins and his new,

lightweight Yam are again proving to be the standard by which all others must be measured. Unbeaten by a member of a rival team in the first three races this year, Coppins will start favourite – but MX1 is by no means a foregone conclusion.

The number one challenger has to be the champion himself, Steve Ramon. It seems strange to depict the title holder as 'challenger' but the Belgian knows himself that he was not as fast as Coppins in '07. That could change in 2008. The 28-year-old, by nature a quiet, reserved character, has come out of his shroud this year and is enjoying himself on the fuel-injection Suzuki. Style does not always mean speed but in Steve's case it is clearly symptomatic of a new psyche. He won't start T-boning rivals off the track but Steve is no longer the easy touch of old.

Everyone seems pretty confident that the

other front runners will be the same as in 2007 which means that not one of them is over 25. How strange that the FIM and Youthstream feel they have to dictate to riders of this age that they must ride MX1 from 2010!

The new Yam seems to fit David Philippaerts (24) like a glove, the Italian able to display outstanding speed without the dramatic, energy-sapping antics of recent years. Ramon too cannot rest on his laurels within the Suzuki set-up but Ken De Dycker (23) is still struggling with his starts and we have yet to see him this year in races which go past the 20-minute mark to discover if the arms will go hard as rock.

Honda return officially with two teams but they lack the riders. Marc De Reuver (25) and Julien Bill, who will hit the quarter-century in May, are not going to win anything for Paolo Martin and, solid and professional as he is, Mike Brown is not going to be champion at 36. Which



Above: MX1 champ Steve Ramon should be Coppins' main rival
Right: Billy Mac's the MX1 Joker



© Andrew Ferguson

NCE



Left: Josh Coppins knows it's now or never if he's to win the crown **Below:** Sébastien POURCEL



leaves them with Billy MacKenzie. Billy turns 24 the day after the opening GP and has to start delivering outside Japan and the UK if he is to make the final step. It started to come in the second half of '07, particularly his against-the-odds top six in the Dutch sand. He is one of the dark horses but he has to prove himself early to start a roll.

Partly from choice, partly because Rattray refused to go MX1, KTM have put most of their eggs in the MX2 basket but all is not completely lost. Max Nagl, at 20 the youngest of the top 10, has shown dramatic strides this year after Everts and Beirer laid down the law and insisted he follow their training regime. If his brittle body can survive the inevitable crashes, this lightning starter should make the most progression.

Jonathan Barragan (22) still gets factory kit but has been moved out of the factory rig to Silver Action. The Spaniard didn't like it and was

out to prove a point with two moto wins at Mantova but his second moto crash indicated he hasn't learned to do it consistently, particularly when the opposition turn the screw.

Kawasaki are the final big player and, with two factory teams, should have been the biggest menace. Manuel Priem (26) can take '08 as a year to settle in and his workmanlike but unspectacular advance is unlikely to bring the ultimate prize.

Team-mate Tanel Leok, still only 22 and 'king of pole', was a bitter disappointment in racing last year after getting as close as anyone to Everts early in 2006 and there is a question mark after his shoulder injury at Valence. If he can put it together the Estonian can win. But that's a pretty big 'if'!

GPKR have already savoured the sweet taste of success in MX2 and have two favourites in their ranks this year. Kevin Strijbos (22) was the

man at the end of '08 – top scoring in four of the last five GPs – but he has already been injured this year. Now back on the bike after an op to remove the chipped bone in his shoulder,

'The Kid' is the prince regent of MX1 but he has been that for a couple of years now already. To be champion he has to deliver over a season.

Team-mate Sébastien POURCEL, just turned 23, is for me THE dark horse. He proved last year that he could ride MX1, his speed this year has been more than impressive and look carefully and you will notice that the elbows are up and his stance on the bike has changed. The most polite rider in the paddock off-track is ready to take no prisoners on it!

James Noble, Brad Anderson, Tom Church and Kenneth Gundersen go for Brit teams. Each can push for top 10 but time has run out for all of these riders in their mid-20s in that quest for the ultimate goal. →

The Kiwi's been waiting a long time to win a world title





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TEAMS AND RIDERS

MX1

Rinaldi Yamaha (I): 6 Josh Coppins (NZ), 19 David Philippaerts (I)
UTAG Dixon Yamaha (GB): 67 Kenneth Gundersen (N)
JK Yamaha (I): 45 Loic Leonce (F)
Van Beers Yamaha (NL): 56 Lauris Freibergs (LV), 111 Aigar Leok (EW)
AC Moscow Yamaha (Rus): 107 Dmitry Parshin (Rus)
Red Bull KTM (A): 12 Max Nagl (D)
Silver Action KTM (I): 7 Jonathan Barragan (E)
Sarholz KTM (D): 27 Marcus Schiffer (D), 108 Kornel Nemeth (H)
KTM UK (NI): 16 James Noble (GB)
Brouwers KTM (NL): 53 Richard McKeown (NI)
GPKR Kawasaki (B): 29 Alexandre Rous (F), 90 Sébastien POURCEL (F), 161 Kevin Strijbos (B)
Kawasaki Europe (NL): 8 Tanel Leok (EW), 32 Manuel Piem (B)
Rabbit Kawasaki (NL): 78 Bas Verhoeven (NL)
Molson Kawasaki (GB): 24 Tom Church (GB)
Sturm Kawasaki (D): 98 Jacob Saylor (USA)
Aprilia (I): 10 Cedric Melotte (B)
JK Aprilia (I): 87 Fabien Izard (F)
Teka World Suzuki (B): 9 Ken De Dycker (B), 11 Steve Ramon (B)
Swift Suzuki (GB): 60 Brad Anderson (GB)
Valenti Suzuki (I): 23 Alex Salvini (I)
Delta Suzuki (CZ): 13 Antti Pyrhonen (SF)
Teka Suzuki (D): 17 Pierre-Alexandre Renet (F), 22 Marvin Van Daele (B)
Inotec Suzuki (D): 25 Clement Desalle (B)
MTM Suzuki (B): 28 Scott Columb (NZ)
CAS Honda (GB): 3 Mike Brown (USA), 211 Billy MacKenzie (GB)
Martin Honda (I): 14 Marc De Reuver (NL), 15 Julien Bill (CH)
G Racing Honda (B): 41 Kris Salaets (B)
TM (I): 121 Chicco Chiodi (I)

MX2

De Carli Red Bull Yamaha (I): 36 Matteo Bonini (I), 222 Tony Cairoli (I), 501 Alessandro Lupino (I)
Ricci Yamaha (I): 28 Roberto Lombrici (I), 39 Davide Guarneri (I), 131 Nico Aubin (F)
3C Yamaha (I): 12 Deny Philippaerts (I), 13 Manuel Monni (I)
UTAG Dixon Yamaha (GB): 15 Carlos Campano (E), 50 Martin Barr (NI)
Shineray Yamaha (B): 75 Dennis Verbruggen (B)
Van Beers Yamaha (NL): 56 Evgeny Bobryshev (Rus)
Van Vijfeijken Yamaha (NL): 86 Rob Van Vijfeijken (NL)
Red Bull KTM (A): 2 Tommy Searle (GB), 4 Tyla Rattray (SA), 10 Rui Gonçalves (P)
Champ KTM (NL): 34 Joel Roelants (B), 43 Francisco Millan (E), 89 Jeremy Van Horebeek (B)
HDI KTM (F): 22 Anthony Boissière (F), 65 Julien Vanni (F)
Silver Action KTM (I): 81 Jeremy Tarroux (F)
KTM UK (NI): 24 Shaun Simpson (GB)
Brouwers KTM (NL): 66 Aigars Bobkovs (LV)
Favor KTM (EW): 37 Gert Krestinov (EW)
Van der Haar KTM (NL): 185 Rinus van de Ven (NL)
Molson Kawasaki (GB): 5 Gareth Swanepoel (SA), 7 Stephen Sword (GB), 11 Gautier Paulin (F)
Bud Kawasaki (F): 64 Khounith Vongsana (F), 100 Brenden Harrison (Aus)
Sturm Kawasaki (D): 42 Brad Graham (USA)
CLS Kawasaki (F): 20 Gregory Aranda (F), 183 Steven Frossard (F)
Swift Suzuki (GB): 44 Elliott Banks-Browne (GB), 45 Jake Nicholls (GB), 47 Pascal Leuret (F)
MVRD Suzuki (GB): 23 Carl Nunn (GB), 46 Jason Dougan (GB)
Inotec Suzuki (D): 121 Xavier Boog (F)
Beursfoon Suzuki (NL): 77 Shannon Terreblanche (SA), 80 Erik Eggens (NL)
Teka Suzuki (D): 111 Evgenij Tyletski (BR)
Delta Suzuki (CZ): 33 Josef Kulhavy (SK)
LS Honda (B): 18 Dennis Dierckx (B), 69 Wyatt Avis (SA)
NGS Honda (F): 25 Marvin Musquin (F), 85 Mickaël Musquin (F)
SRS Honda (I): 8 Matti Seistola (SF), 9 Mauro Fiorentili (I)

THE TEXT TELLS IT ALREADY BUT HERE
ARE YER UNCLE ALEX'S PREDICTIONS...

MX1

1 Josh Coppins (but only just)
2 Sébastien POURCEL
3 Steve Ramon
Joker: Billy MacKenzie

MX2

1 Tommy Searle
2 Tyla Rattray
3 Tony Cairoli
Joker: Stephen Sword



Gautier Paulin goes in
MX2 for Molson Kawasaki



Max Nagl carries the hopes of KTM
on his 20-year-old shoulders in MX1



It's by no means a done deal but
Tommy Searle is in with a real shout
of MX2 world championship glory

Below: Elliott Banks-Browne will be hoping to qualify... **Right:** ...but Swordy will be looking to win



After his domination during 2007, Tony Cairoli will start favourite for a third title in MX2. But even the 22-year-old Sicilian couldn't successfully defend his first title and may well encounter similar difficulties this term. For sure he and Yamaha are aware of the pitfalls facing an overconfident champ so they will not take any setbacks lightly but there are two reasons to believe that he can be toppled from his throne this summer.

The first is preparation. Tony was man enough to admit last year that he was not ready in 2006 and in 2007 he did everything right. But mistakes have been made this winter...

The body can take a lot of punishment but sometime during the winter the mind needs to chill. Tony spent the last two months of '07 racing chickenshit supercross – laughably

entitled the European championship – and even managed to get hurt on the way. And he's not spent the spring preparing for the MX2 GPs but rather for his switch to MX1 in 2009.

A race of any kind on your GP bike is worth more than 20 days of practice at this time of the year and his MX1 adventure in Italy is not exactly going to plan either. Tony is there for the taking this summer and there are two rivals ready to do just that!

Tommy Searle is the perfect successor in the tradition of Noyce and Thorpe. His speed in the early races is not too much too early. Yes, he has been in the US and, yes, the opposition are comparatively cold but a 17-year-old who can score 10 podiums in a season is ready for gold at 18. Tommy's biggest hurdle is to actually win a major title (youth and U21 don't count in the real world) but he has learned immediately from

every mistake over the last two seasons. He is danger man number one – and Cairoli knows it. And Cairoli also knows Tommy will not be intimidated like Cri Pourcel was last year.

The other challenger is Tyla Rattray. Written off in many quarters – the '07 Stylo was never going to win anything – the 22-year-old from Durban has matured this winter and has come out with all guns blazing. Tyla has now acknowledged that he was two seconds off the pace last year. Mantova, from the front and from the back, proved that he has corrected that and, more importantly, he has learned to do it when it matters. No heroics in training but explosive energy in the race. Tyla is back.

The rest are racing for fourth but there are plenty of them.

Rui Goncalves, third man at Red Bull, will make podiums again and Yamaha's 'future' –

Gareth Swanepoel's key is his calm style – and the South African's pretty rapid as well



© Toby Fuller



© Toby Fuller

Left: Can 2008 be the year Tyla Rattray stays fit? **Below:** The Reverend Jake Nicholls is another Brit aiming to qualify **Below right:** Shaun Simpson proved he's got the speed at Hawkstone



© Toby Fuller



Nico Aubin and the Italian connection Guarneri, Bonini and Monni – are no threat for the title. Soon 20, the French kid may win a GP but his ineffectiveness from the back will end his hopes.

Boissiere, Van Horebeek, Musquin – the list of continental hopefuls for a place is long but the British teams have landed the biggest coups when it comes to future talent and older riders who could upset the applecart.

Gareth Swanepoel was the highest placed Maxxis contender other than Searle last year and the South African's key is, like Goncalves, his calm style. It won Chiodi three 125 titles but is probably not enough this year. Like Goncalves, podiums will come.

Stephen Sword has suffered three traumatic seasons with injury but he has come back an even more mature rider and looked sharp too at Valence. If anyone can step up to the big three

then it's the 28-year-old Scot.

Gautier Paulin has a star teacher in Jacky Vimond and the natural talent and drive of Bayle, Tortelli and Pourcel. By mid-summer the 18-year-old rookie could have learned enough to be pushing regular podiums but his goal is the title in 2009.

Suzuki step into the frame this year with factory bikes for Pascal Leuret and Xavier Boog. Leuret, the artisan apprentice from the Pichon school, worked wonders on Hondas last year, can gate and has the power in the RMZ250WS to do the job. Turning 27 next month, his chances of a world title are not great but he should give Swift their maiden podium somewhere along the way.

The prize for most improved rider of the year could go to Shaun Simpson. The talent was already there but injuries and breakdowns have

hampered a faster road to glory. If the 20-year-old doesn't have a single digit ranking by the end of the year I'll have to buy a new hat.

Carl Nunn's best days on the GP circuit are probably behind him by now. Nunny is still good for top 10 but it doesn't matter how well the MVR-D bikes work, they are not factory. But the 28-year-old and his eight years younger team-mate Jason Dougan should have fun and push each other along.

Martin Barr also looks even better than last season as he stakes out his career two years too late after wasting that period on 450s as a teenager. Expect regular points and a few top 10s for Steve Dixon's Ulsterman.

Back at Swift, Elliott Banks-Browne and Jake Nicholls will hopefully push each other on to qualify each week but there is still a long way to go to ultimate glory.



Left: Antonio Cairoli's winter preparations have not been ideal **Far left:** Expect regular points – and a few top 10s – from Martin Barr

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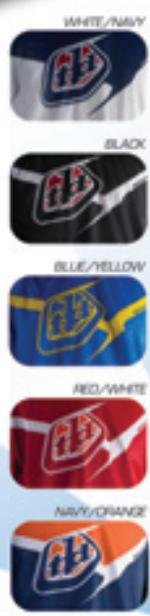


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profile

*Kevin Strijbos' switch
from Suzuki to Kawasaki
surprised many
GP pit pundits*



THIRD TIME LUCKY?

KEVIN STRIJBOS' SWITCH FROM SUZUKI TO KAWASAKI SENT SHOCKWAVES THROUGH THE GP Paddock but after an off-season op – and a pre-season hiccup – the 2006 and 2007 MX1 vice-champ is looking to go one better in '08...

Words and photos by ALEX HODGKINSON

When Kevin Strijbos announced mid-summer that he would be leaving Suzuki at the end of the year it sent shockwaves through the paddock. 'The Kid' had ridden GPs in yellow since he was 16, they had gone through thick and thin together and the marriage seemed inseparable – then suddenly it was all going to end.

One week later the 22-year-old had signed for GPKR Kawasaki and the upcoming separation seemed to free Kevin from his severe mid-season slump. Top scorer in four of the final five GPs, he swept from nowhere to clinch his second consecutive silver medal and, had his revival started just one race earlier, he would have been world champion!

It was November before the Japanese code of conduct permitted Kawasaki to officially announce their coup and, with his Suzuki contract out at the turn of the year, Kevin could finally speak openly about what happened behind closed doors last summer.

At first Kevin was holding back. "I think it was time to change. I had spent so many years on Suzuki. Even though I had a contract for '08 things didn't work out so well at the time. I don't have any ill-feelings towards my ex team. It is still a good team and I like the people but it was just time to change."

But – like an over-eager customs official – we kept probing! "The final thing was when they told me before the Czech GP that it was either MX2 or out. And I decided to leave!"

Both sides had maintained a diplomatic silence through the closing months of 2007 but the word had come out of the big yellow awning in the last few weeks of the summer that it was Kevin himself who had asked to ride MX2!

"Yes, I had told the team back in the summer when I wasn't feeling well with the problems in my knee that maybe it was a good opportunity to go to MX2, just for one year. But they hummed and hah'd – 'we don't have a good bike' – and this and that. I stressed again that we just needed to speak about the possibility.

"Then two weeks later they said 'yes, it's okay for MX2'. I said 'we need to speak about it, I didn't say I just want to go MX2, we need to speak because you told me the bikes were not ready and so on'. But they just said MX2 is ready and I should ride it. Then in Czechy they turned around again, they said they had a new sponsor and I could come back to MX1 after all but I am not stupid. There had been too many turns. Ken [De Dycker] had been signed, Steve [Ramon] had re-signed and I was sitting there thinking 'heh, where do I fit into this?'

Strijbos gets the power down on the factory 450 at Mantova



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"They had wanted to drop my contract fee also and suddenly that changed too. Now that it is finished we can be friends again but it was difficult then. I still like the people at Suzuki. Now it's over we are still friends and I think it is still possible that we could come together again some time but there was a lot of tension and it was time to stop."

Just seven days later the Kawasaki contract was on the table waiting to be signed. Surely it couldn't all have happened so quickly?

"No, that's true. I had started taking seriously with GPKR already in Sweden. We had just been chatting before that even and Patrick [Gelade, GPKR team owner] had said he would be interested in me but in Sweden I came to them. We were both looking for something else for next year and it developed from there."

"I was also talking to CAS but I felt more comfortable with GPKR. I would not say that CAS is a bad team but I didn't feel so good with the people there when we started talking. I am Flemish and GPKR are Wallonian but we are all Belgian and we have a lot of fun together. My head told me it was the right place to go, just because of the feeling."

So how has Kevin settled down to his new job? "I missed the Nations to have the operation on my knee, then we went to Japan for testing before taking some more time off for the winter. Then on January 13 we went down to Spain.

"We tested quite a few different things in Japan. I had told them already before we went that I wanted a motor with more

top. And when we got there they already had the bike ready. The Kawasaki always handled well but I felt we needed just a little bit more power to help with the starts. Already at Suzuki I felt this was something that was missing."

"It is still good in the turns, we just need to see how it is when we are racing. You never know until you actually get in a race against others how something is working. Outright speed is not everything, you need to have the traction to make passes too. I would like to hope that we can always get the holeshot but I don't think so. Maybe it doesn't work and we need to change back but I don't think so."

And the arrival of Strijbos has been felt throughout the team. "Sebastien [Pource] had initially asked for a different direction but after he had ridden mine he chose that too!"

Everything was going rosy but that Spanish interlude in January has disrupted plans. "We didn't do any testing in Spain. I had the new bike but I just went there to get back into riding again first. Then I made a crash. I came out of a corner, the rear wheel stepped out, I high-sided and landed straight on my shoulder. It was a silly crash. I wasn't pushing, just riding easy and I slipped."

"There is a small bone broken inside the shoulder. At first I didn't worry but it was getting more and more painful every time I rode. I went to see Doctor Claes in Belgium, he did a scan and found the broken bone. He is not sure yet whether I need an operation or whether it will heal with time. The bone is back in place now but I have to see first whether or not the pain will go."



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"So I took 12 days off from riding before Mantova. I'm still not sure what we need to do. In training there I was having pain after a couple of laps every time but I was able to finish all three races. Every time I go out I feel strong, I was setting the fastest lap for a long time in qualification and I feel good on the bike but I only rode for 10 days so far this year."

Kevin's career has been dogged by injury and illness since he became the youngest ever GP moto winner on an Open class bike in 2004. The next summer a mystery blood infection laid him low until he burst back with a stunning overall victory in Czecho and that knee has interrupted his season in each of the last two summers despite finishing runner-up in the world both times.

"The knee is good now, The operation was a complete success and I don't have any problem with that or my blood. The timing of the operation was good. I didn't have the pressure to get ready for racing again so I could follow the perfect plan for building the muscle again and I did a lot of exercise for the muscle. Everything is okay now – I just hope that all of my injury

problems are behind me soon."

Second in the world for the last two years, there can only be one career move – but Kevin's keeping his cool.

"I don't put pressure on myself that I must not be number two again but it is important for me not to get injured so that I can be in the top five every race. I won many races last year and had many times top three but there were too many times when I crashed. I could be top three and then in Sweden and Faenza I was 17th. Too many big ups and downs and that cost me the title."

"My strategy has to be to avoid the bad scores. I know I can make the good results but I must not spoil my season with the bad races. And I need better starts. Sometimes they were really bad last year so I need to work on them and the first step was to ask Kawasaki to make me the bike with more top."

"Now I think we have a good bike, we just have to see. I feel good when I start alone in practice but that's normal – you never really know how it is until you start with 30 other guys."

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Kevin's still friends with Suzuki technicians, from left, Frank Schroyen and Luc Piccart and Kayaba man Gunther Geerts

BIG HITTERS

STRIJBOS' MAIN CHALLENGERS

So who are the men Kevin reckons will put up the stiffest competition to his title challenge in 2008?

"Josh [Coppins] will be good again, I didn't see Steve [Ramon] riding until Mantova but for sure he will be up there too. In fact I didn't see anybody riding with their new bikes before Mantova so it is difficult to know for sure but I think the MX1 championship will be between the same guys as last year. And Josh has to be the target. He will be there."

It is a tribute to the Kiwi that Kevin rates him so highly because Josh had brought the scorn of the young Belgian on himself two summers ago when, during his absence from the track, he suggested that all of the younger generation were making it too easy for Stefan Everts.

And in Portugal last summer Kevin saw red when Josh turned round and waved to him after passing for the lead early in race two. It was a mistake by the Kiwi because the Belgian regrouped and came back at him for the win. How does Kevin remember the incident?

"It made me angry but I didn't start riding wild, I actually started to ride easy again and just pulled him in. It was a good feeling being able to show him that he shouldn't have done that."



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GAS GAS WEIGH IN FOR '08 WITH A QUARTET OF STONKING SPANISH STROKERS THAT ARE ALL READY TO RIP...

Words by Geoff Walker Photos by Sutty

There is absolutely no doubt that the Spanish have some of the best off-road riding territory in Europe in which to develop their dirt bikes so it's no surprise that Gas Gas, Spain's biggest off-road bike manufacturer, is pushing its range of enduro and trials bikes hard throughout the world.

Gas Gas has worked hard on its '08 range to take another step forwards in build quality for its customers. The bikes all come dressed in red and they look good – clean lines and simple build make the Gassers no-nonsense, ready-to-race enduro machines. These bikes have their own style and although they are not at the cutting edge of fashion they get the job done (and, to be fair, Gas Gas importer Shirty has enough style to go around!).

Talking of Shirty, if you are going to buy a bike and the guy at the top of the tree has dirt pumping through his veins then you can guarantee that the factory are getting good feedback. And JS and his team of riders most certainly have dirt a-pumpin' – and this means that you feel the full benefit as the bikes improve and extra set-up tips become available. The Gas Gas crew here in the UK have a passion for all things off-road and this can only be good.

For the test we had the EC125, 200, 250 and 300cc two-strokes to ride and rate at a cracking venue in North Wales.





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EC125

LITTLE BELTER

The 125 is always a bike I look forward to riding on any test and the little Gasser does not disappoint. The motor has to be worked hard to get the best from it but this is to be expected with every 125 off-road bike out there.

With 15 stone on board the EC125 ripped its way up the hills and with minimal clutch work n'all. The power directly off the bottom allowed the bike to work across slippery stuff but a 125 is a 125 – they are made to be ridden hard and this motor is no different.

The chassis still has a little bit of that 'special' Gas Gas feel to it. It feels quite jacked up on the rear which is a good way to run the bike for flat grass turns but it upsets the balance across the bike in some situations out on the trails. There is obviously room to adjust this for personal preference and backing the pre-load off one turn on the rear shock would bring a little more balance for my comfort. Like I say this is personal.

The forks work great on the 125 and I am glad to report they are a little soft for me which means anyone buying this bike who is the right size for it will be in for a pleasing front end action.



The '08 Gassers are equally at home in slower going...



...as they are on faster, more technical trails



EC200

SERIOUSLY SMOOTH

The 200cc enduro motor is a perfect capacity for so many trail riders and serious racers. The smooth, reliable power comes from nothing and will have you skipping across roots while providing a seamless transfer through the mid-range and into the top-end.

This smooth transfer of power comes from good carburetion and the motor's smart interior design. The test bike pulled really well in all situations and the smooth and forgiving characteristic of the motor made for an easy ride whether it was technical or fast going. This is an engine which will not tire you out over a long day and only the most power-sapping of conditions will catch it out.

Like its little brother, the EC200 has that slightly raised feeling from the rear so we were lucky to have a different link to make the rear end squat down a little. As the day went on I went back to try the 200 set-up a couple of times and in the end I got to like the bike with its rear set slightly lower. This was a good mod to try and I'm sure it would work across the range but especially on the 200 and 125 as they are still light enough to chuck around the turns with the rear that bit lower.

Again the forks worked smooth on the 200. They were a little fast on rebound on the small bumps but this is easily fixed. The main plus with this year's Marzocchis is that the internal set-up is a fantastic starting point for you to tweak your bike for your style of riding.

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EC250

READY TO RIP!

The motor on the EC250 rips but in a controllable way and there is an abundance of grunt from the motor which doesn't peak too quickly. The power is long enough to hold a low gear up a steep hill but if you find yourself hooking a gear too high the thing will still pull you up there with minimal effort.

This 250 motor has the strongest low-end pull of any enduro engine I have tested for '08. Grip is easily found with this kind of power as long as you don't pull the trigger too hard. Good positive clutch feel comes on the EC250 as well as from all its stable mates and one-finger action is not a problem.

With a bit more weight being pulled around the chassis seems to settle down. That extra load works both ends of the bike in a more balanced manner and instils confidence to push harder. The bike doesn't have a super-light feeling but it feels balanced and strong in its tracking and stability. The new slightly softer seat means you don't feel like you're being cut in two with your hairy boys becoming estranged from each other which can only be a good thing for us all. There is just simply no good coming from going down that particular road!

Like with the 200 the forks were a bit fast at the top of the stroke but I'm sure if I was pushing harder on slightly softer ground the forks would have been working in the mid to lower part of the stroke where the damping felt spot on.



SPECS

EC125 >>

Capacity:	124cc
Bore and stroke:	54mm x 54.5mm
Front suspension:	45mm USD Marzocchi (295mm travel)
Rear suspension:	Sachs (310mm travel)
Front brake:	260mm disc
Rear brake:	220mm disc
Carburettor:	38mm
Gearbox:	Six-speed
Seat height:	945mm
Wheelbase:	1460mm
Dry weight:	92kg

EC200 >>

Capacity:	199.4cc
Bore and stroke:	62.5mm x 65mm
Front suspension:	45mm USD Marzocchi (295mm travel)
Rear suspension:	Sachs (310mm travel)
Front brake:	260mm disc
Rear brake:	220mm disc
Carburettor:	38mm
Gearbox:	Six-speed
Seat height:	945mm
Wheelbase:	1476mm
Dry weight:	95kg

EC250 >>

Capacity:	249.3cc
Bore and stroke:	66.4mm x 72mm
Front suspension:	45mm USD Marzocchi (295mm travel)
Rear suspension:	Sachs (310mm travel)
Front brake:	260mm disc
Rear brake:	220mm disc
Carburettor:	38mm
Gearbox:	Six-speed
Seat height:	945mm
Wheelbase:	1476mm
Dry weight:	97kg

EC300 >>

Capacity:	294.7cc
Bore and stroke:	72mm x 72mm
Front suspension:	45mm USD Marzocchi (295mm travel)
Rear suspension:	Sachs (310mm travel)
Front brake:	260mm disc
Rear brake:	220mm disc
Carburettor:	38mm
Gearbox:	Six-speed
Seat height:	945mm
Wheelbase:	1476mm
Dry weight:	98kg

EC300.

MOTOR-VATION!

What a motor! Swinging a leg over this bike was a pleasure as pretty much everything fell into place. The engine really does make great power and it feels smooth with it.

Don't get me wrong, this weapon has the capability to get you into some serious shapes but ridden well you will find yourself setting fast times and covering the ground on trails like you didn't think possible. The motor lures you in with its smoothness and then lets you know what's going on when you are approaching a turn at warp speed and you have to lay it on thick with the Brembos! It really is just as well the brakes work so well on the Gassers because they are required on the EC300 if you happen to be riding it with a hard-on!

Again the chassis feels controlled and balanced on the 300 and with the forks a little slower and the shock pushing well into its stroke the smile was spread across my comedy Oirish cheeks. Comfortable on the bike and with the seating position providing just a little 'on top' feeling, the EC300 was giving great feedback and tracking precisely on the cambers and out of the turns over the choppy going.

JUDGE GEOFFREY

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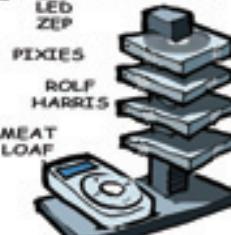
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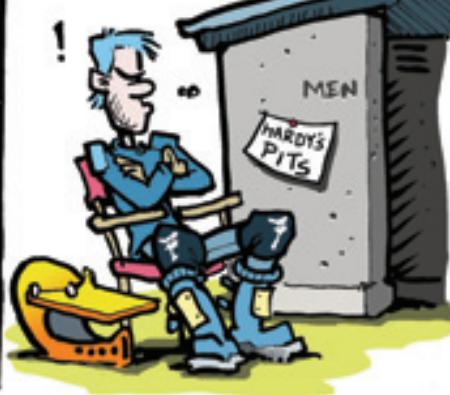
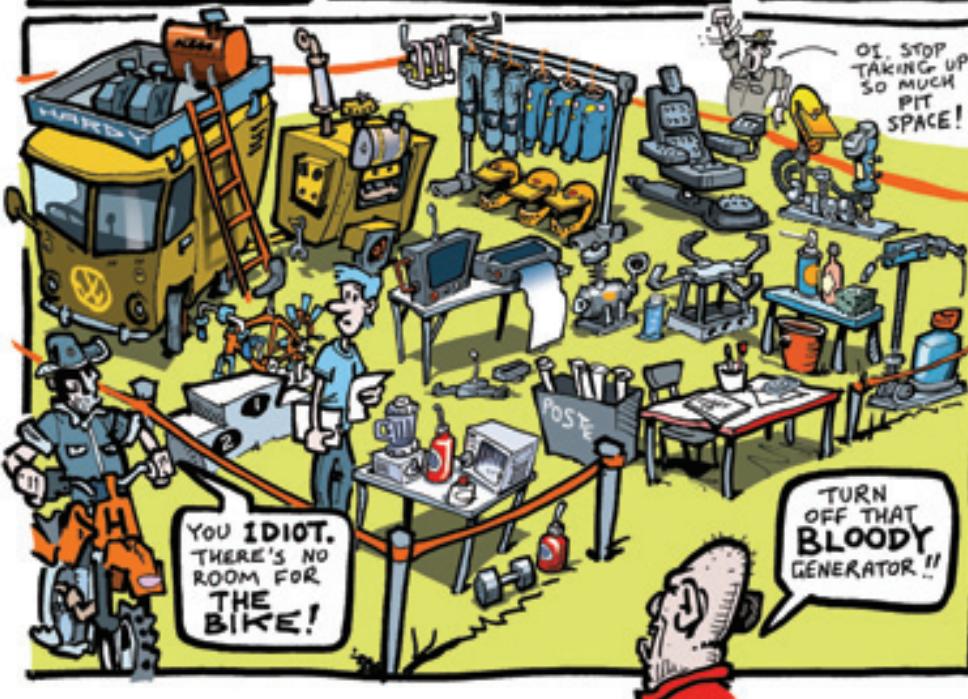
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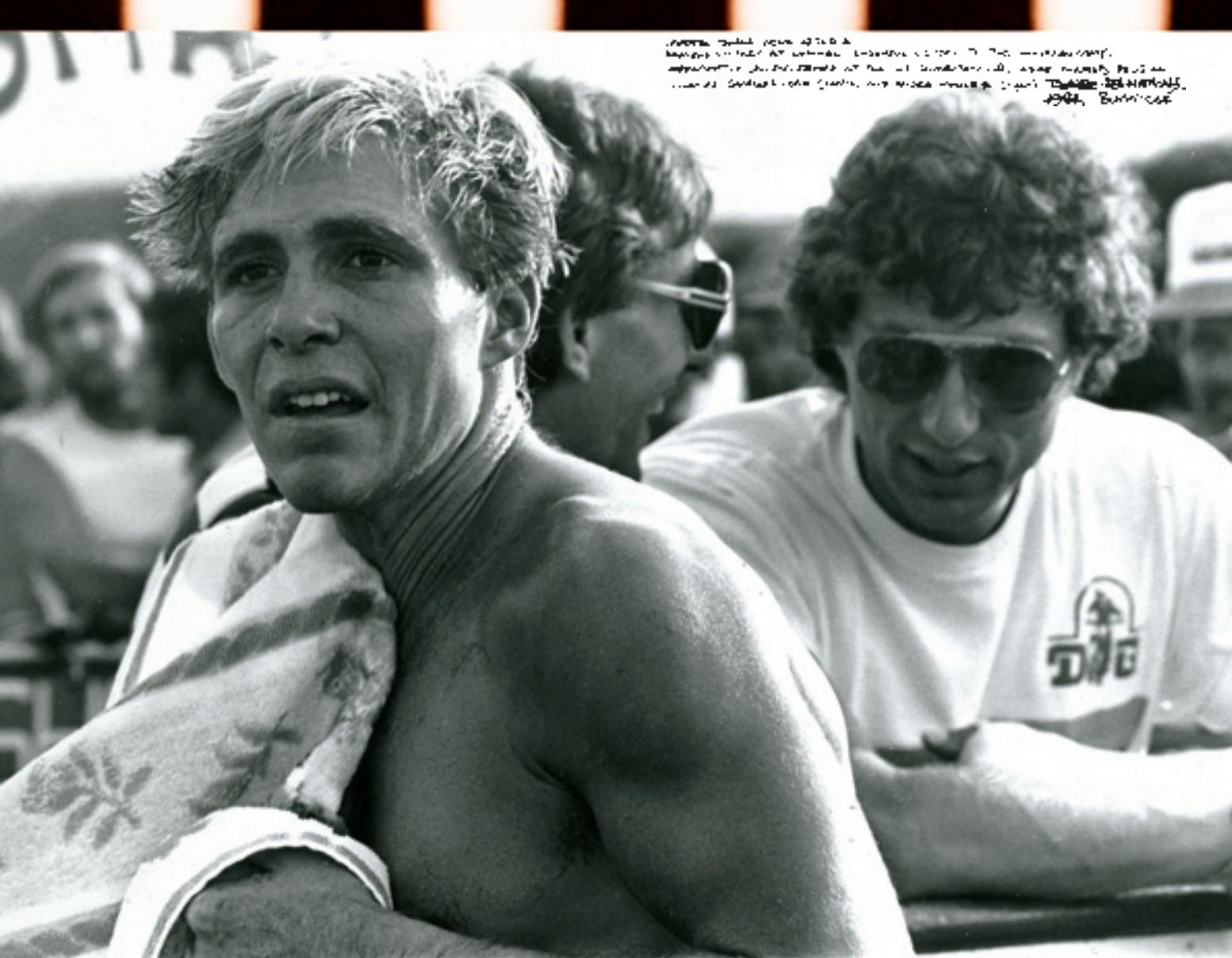
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LOMMEL LEGENDS!

BACK ON THE GP CALENDAR AFTER A LENGTHY ABSENCE, THE DEEP SAND OF LOMMEL WILL ONCE AGAIN TEST MAN AND MACHINE TO THEIR VERY LIMITS...

Words and photos by Jack Burnicle

SO THE notorious sandy wastes of Lommel will return to Belgian Grand Prix action this summer after the sad demise of Namur.

For a place so fabled, Lommel has rarely actually featured in a world championship before. The first GP took place there in 1993 during the days of three silly short motos when 250cc world champion elect Greg Albertyn won two races and Stefan Everts the third – although both lost out to a consistent Marnicq Bervoets for the overall verdict.

A year later another 250 GP brought Albee's only double DNF of the season when, with only two 30-minute races to run, he twice ran his factory Suzuki out of fuel to allow arch-rival Everts a double victory.

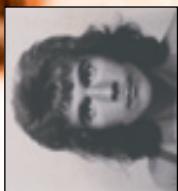
After a three-year gap the big bangers were launched round Lommel in the 1997 500cc season opener. Honda privateers Gert Jan van Doorn and Avo Leok tied on points with Tanel's Estonian uncle edging the verdict with a better second race result.

But Lommel's true place in MX history dates much further back to September 1981 and the annual Trophée des Nations contest for 250cc machines. The USA had last sent a squad over for the Motocross and Trophée des in 1978 when the latter had also taken place in Belgium at

Kester. The home nation won with America's quartet Bob Hannah, Chuck Sun and a hairy, bearded pair of slow dudes called Tommy Croft and Rex Staten finishing fifth behind Czechoslovakia.

But the States were conspicuously absent for the next two years due to a combination of politics, infighting, budget cuts and egomania. By 1980, at Maggiora in Italy, Belgium's brilliant trio of reigning world champions Andre Malherbe, Georges Jobe and Harry Everts, along with Andre Vromans, had claimed a record-breaking 10 successive Trophée des Nations titles.

For 1981 they were back on home sand of the deepest and gnarliest variety at Lommel but the Yanks also returned, more by fluke than foresight and thanks mainly to Belgium's most famous export! America's big-name stars Hannah and AMA National champions Kent Howerton, Mark Barnett, Broc Glover and Mike Bell declined to make the trip. The case looked hopeless until a group of 'industry insiders' headed by Motocross Action editor Dick Miller, Hi-Point Gear's fabled commentator Larry Maiers and Bel-Ray's president JJ Hanfield took up the cause.



RETIRED BELGIAN ROGER DE COSTER IS ONE OF THE FEW TO HAVE MADE THE JUMP FROM MOTOCROSS TO THE 500GP

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+ several US AMA National Championships
Said 1981: 'I'm still in view more fight of the year'



Recently retired Belgian superstar Roger De Coster, a five-time world champion who knew how much the team contests meant in Europe – and also how cockily his fellow Belgians viewed their apparently innate superiority – had been hired by American Honda and talked his new employer into sending a team of young Red Riders. This initially comprised former 500cc AMA National champions Danny Laporte and 1981 US 500 GP winner Chuck Sun, Donnie Hansen and Unadilla 250 GP race winner Steve Wise. Bel-Ray's European chief Thuur Coen agreed to supply all the logistical support and transportation needs for the squad and suddenly Team USA was up and running.

But Wise hurt his ribs practising and just two days before the team was due to leave Honda US team manager Dave Arnold rang 20-year-old 1980 US 125 GP winner Johnny O'Mara to ask

'The O'Show' to pack his bags.

In America's favour, top two Belgians Malherbe and Jobe were both out of action with arm injuries. Their replacements were relatively inexperienced youngsters Eric Geboers and Marc Velkeniers, second and fourth respectively behind Harry Everts in the world 125 championship. They joined Everts and renowned sandmeister Andre Vromans, fourth in the 500 GPs that year.

With Belgium seeded through as hosts and reigning champions, Saturday afternoon's 20-minute qualifying races trimmed 13 other countries down to seven and were startlingly blitzed by the USA. Ah, said the pundits sagely, but they won't last two 45-minute motos tomorrow and, anyway, the Europeans weren't really trying.

Well, actually...

>>

was armed with his mum's Kodak Brownie camera.
After art college he mixed life as a graphic designer,
magazine art director, photographer and part-time art
college tutor with motocross and photo-journalism.
Now he's a commentator, painting pictures with words.
He never did get a proper job...

JACK BURNICLE is the godfather (our words, not his) of British MX journalism. Born in Billingham, County Durham, to Bella and nutty (his words, not ours) musical genius Stan Burnicle, Jack was mad about cars and motor racing as a kid. At sweet 16 he got a motorbike, rode it to a local scramble and was instantly hopelessly hooked. Next time he went he

PROLOGUE: THE MASTERS, BELGIUM, 1981:
Tired but triumphant Americans (left to right)
Dennis Hansen, Chuck Sun + Johnny O'Mara.

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The Americans, thanks to De Coster, knew local ace Vromans would be untouchable so they cleverly planned to let him go. Only the best six out of eight race results counted. The Yanks were dressed dazzlingly from head to toe in white and – with the fine weather ensuring dry, powdery conditions – remained pretty much Persil fresh as they settled into the whooped-out sand track running second, third, fourth and sixth!

O'Mara eventually crossed the line 14 seconds behind Vromans with LaPorte and Hansen in his wake. Sun slipped back to eighth but still outran Everts and Geboers. The vast, fanatical crowd fell into an eerie, bewildered silence – America led their unquestioned heroes by nine points to the 20 of the three best Belgians.

Vromans and Geboers responded by holeshotting race two. The crowd erupted ecstatically but their high hopes faded with the warm autumn sunshine. Geboers and Everts crashed downfield where Velkeneers already struggled alongside Chuck Sun. 'Danny the Door' inherited second and pursued Vromans with rugged determination. Hansen faded back to 11th but Johnny O' had stormed through to a thrilling third by half-distance as Sun hooked up with Everts and nicked sixth place from Stefan's dad on the final lap to complete a monumental American conquest.

If all the European teams' best scores had been added together the States' would still have won! Stout six-time world 250 champion Joel Robert jestingly approached the president of the Belgian Motorcycle Federation, offering his and Roger De Coster's services. "You need all the help you can get," grinned Joel.



Jobe and Malherbe, the latter with his left arm in plaster, pointedly ignored their compatriots' stricken compound and chatted amiably with the victorious Americans as the latter towelled down, still in a state of slightly incredulous euphoria at their epic feat. It's hard to realise today just what an astonishing accomplishment this was around the roughest, nastiest sand trap known to man. Belgium, routed by 20 points to 37, would endure a humiliating 15-year MX and Trophee des Nations drought and the motocross world would never be quite the same again.

Danny LaPorte immediately received three offers to race the European GPs in 1982 and went on to win the 250cc world title for Yamaha while both Hansen and O'Mara became supercross and AMA 250 National champions and Honda legends.

And at the age of 50, Chuck Sun would turn up at the 2007 British MX GP and be refused a ride in the Veterans' class for being too young to be eligible. How short can some idiotic memories be!

There was one other awesome hero that remarkable day, though, who doesn't even appear in the results. Englishman Graham Noyce – the man who'd narrowly lost the 1981 500cc world championship – produced one of those almost indescribably epic rides that peppered his excitingly erratic career. Through absolute force of will, Noyce pounded out a truly incredible second moto on an alien 250, holding fourth place and hanging with the factory projectiles of LaPorte and O'Mara until his gasping, bog-standard Honda ran dry on the last lap!

CLEWS MISSILE!

CCM'S NEW CMX450 MAY BE TURNING HEADS – BUT HAS IT GOT WHAT IT TAKES TO TURN LAPS AS WELL? THERE WAS ONLY ONE WAY TO FIND OUT...

Test by Greg Hanson Photos by still-mx.co.uk

With CCM making their international motocross comeback at Hawkstone at the beginning of March after an absence of 20 years, interest in the legendary British manufacturer is running as high as it was in the Bolton firm's halcyon days of the mid to late '70s.

The YZF-engined CMX450 was raced in anger at Hawkstone by Ollie Sandiford Smith but a few weeks earlier we got the chance to put the bike through its paces at Southport Leisure Lakes. For our test we utilised the talents of Greg Hanson – the man whose broken leg signalled the start of CCM's international MX hiatus at the Italian GP in 1988.

Over to you Greg...

"Testing the new CCM was something I was very much looking forward to. I first saw the bike at the Dirt Bike Show at the end of last year and after a lengthy conversation with Austin [Clews] and Gary [Hartnern] I soon realised a lot of time and technology had been put into developing this latest machine.

"After arriving at Leisure Lakes the bike was pulled out of the truck and my first impressions were pretty positive – it's certainly a stunning looking machine (and the colour matched my kit) with all the right equipment to do the job. I was

just hoping the bike performed as well as it came across.

"The track was still icy in places so my first session was tentative but immediately I knew the dimensions of this chassis worked as it was balanced perfectly. After six or seven laps I came in and asked Ollie [Sandiford-Smith] if he wanted to do a few laps as I wanted to alter the suspension and knowing he knew the track I could pick up some lines.

"When Ollie came in after some very quick laps I made the adjustments to the suspension and with the track ice-free set about putting some quick laps in. The faster I went the better the feedback the bike gave me – this CCM turns superbly and the confidence you get to plant it into a corner is what you'd expect from a 250. It's hard to believe that it's the 450 you're riding!

"The Magura hydraulic clutch comes as standard and its light, positive feel just adds to the pleasure. The six-piece alloy chassis is very nicely done indeed – with no welding it's put together using a type of dove joint which is then glued and heat-treated at 60 degrees for two hours, an idea that's also used on the Aston Martin chassis.

"Gluing a frame may not sound as strong as welding but in conversation with the team about this advanced technology they assured me even

without the bonding on the frame it mechanically can not come apart. The pegs are positioned perfectly for comfortable cornering and movement on the bike and the gear shifter and rear brake pedal are positioned like that of CCM's Japanese counterparts.

"The YZF 450 Yamaha engine fitted with a DEP S7 pipe provides lovely power delivery which is very useable and sharp down low with lots of torque – although I would like it to be able to hold a gear a bit longer – and the WP TRAX semi-factory suspension gave me confidence to keep it under power as it soaked up rough terrain with excellent stability.

"The full carbon sub-frame and filter box is made by Italian company CRM with the seat, tank and rad scoops coming from a '08 KTM. One thing I wasn't exactly delighted with was the seat foam which could have been a bit firmer for my liking.

"Overall this bike has, for me at least, virtually got it all – a state-of-the-art chassis, the proven YZF450 motor, semi-factory suspension, a choice of off-set triple clamps, carbon sub-frame and filter box, Talon wheels, hydraulic clutch, Renthal bars and DEP S7 pipe. In my opinion for CCM to have put a competitive machine together in such a short period of time that is such a joy to ride deserves a big pat on the back!"



Rolling back the years!
Greg gives it big licks on the latest machine to come rip-snorting out of the CCM factory

"The CCM turns superbly,"
reckons Greg – and on this
evidence who are we to
argue with him?



CLASSY CHASSIS

IT'S A STICK-UP!

The CMX450's frame uses technology that's a first for the MX world although Aston Martin utilises a very similar process when building its mega-money cars for pampered Premiership footie stars.

The aluminium-bonded chassis features no welds or bolts, instead the six parts that make up the frame are completely glued together with everything set solid by a heat-treating process. This results in a chassis that's a claimed three kilos lighter than the equivalent part from KTM.

A carbon fibre sub-frame and tank continue the weight-saving although the whole process certainly isn't cheap – CCM managing director Gary Harthern reckons each of the factory machines costs over £30,000!

With Ollie Sandiford-Smith and Richie Worrall twisting the throttle, CCM hope to compete in at least three GPs this season. The plan is that the publicity this attracts will draw in further funding to finance a full season on the world championship stage in 2009.



**The six-piece frame
is glued together**



**Semi-factory WP suspension
soaks up big landings**



GARY HARTHERN

A BIT FROM THE BOSS

"A big part of CCM's history and the foundations of its status as a manufacturer came from producing motocrossers in the 1970s and '80s, it is entrenched in the off-road scene. Since then – under previous management – priorities have veered more towards road-based bikes which has served CCM well and a large section of our output is road-based but I felt that a return to our motocross roots was extremely worthwhile from a PR perspective. People are very nostalgic about the off-road bikes from two or three decades ago and we don't find that so much with the road machines."

"There is a deep affinity for racing among motorcyclists and that is why people like Honda and Yamaha spend the money that they do. Their presence and high level within racing helps create a 'buyer mentality' and that's what we wanted to be a part of. With CCM being such a small company to then come back into mainstream motocross and try and compete on equal terms with the likes of the Japanese and KTM is a daunting prospect but that David vs Goliath circumstance is also part of the firm's fabric and it is an exciting time for us."

"The 450 project was largely based on the range of bikes that we currently manufacture between that 450-600cc bracket. We never intended for the bike to go into production, despite many reports to the contrary. It was done originally to prove certain concepts that we hopefully eventually want to bring to the factory floor. Since we introduced the CMX to the press we have been inundated with requests and enquiries but the simple fact of the matter is that these bikes cannot be bought as they are very much factory 'one-offs'."

"There will only be between six and eight built for the riders. The CMX is about proving our technical excellence with innovative concepts – for a small company like us that is quite a big deal. We have not tried to re-invent the wheel. We have used the very best suspension, brakes and components that are available to us – like WP and Brembo – but the chassis is pretty special. It is made of only six parts and makes the bike three kilos lighter than its nearest competitor which is the KTM. There is no steel or aluminium in the sub-frame – it is all carbon-fibre, so is the tank."

"We have had to use components from here and there because to do this project – including a whole engine development programme – would not have been achievable in the time-scale we wanted. We started in July last year and we had a show-bike in Milan by November. Everybody said that a bike could not be built and raced in six months but this is what we have done and will do. Hopefully it will stay in one piece!"

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KTM

BRITISH LIONS

A POTTED HISTORY OF CCM

Words by Bill Lawless*

CCM founder Alan Clews was a premiership performer as rider, engineer and businessman. He started with an already elderly BSA motor in 1971 and used it to power machinery that came close to winning British titles and world championship rounds.

It was all very improbable – a small North West company flying the flag for Great Britain and playing David against the Goliaths of the Japanese factories for the better part of a decade. He also nurtured a breed of outstanding British riders and characters – hard-chargers like Bob Wright, John Banks, Jimmy Aird, Norman Barrow and Vic Eastwood.

Clews was a considerable rider himself in both trials and motocross. As a regular performer at home, a member of the continental MX circus in the '60s and a qualified engineer he knew what people wanted and he knew how to fill the need.

The first CCMs emerged from Clews' domestic garage and were powered by versions of the venerable BSA B40/44 motor, the first of which had been over-bored to a mighty 600-plus cc. The first few were known as the Clews Stroka and were welcomed with open arms by some good, hard centre riders who didn't hold with the new-fangled two-strokes and swiftly launched the thumpers to a successful start.

With demand exceeding supply, Clews moved production to an old factory in Bolton in 1972 having wheedled a supply of B50 motors and various chassis and suspension bits direct from BSA at Small Heath. From these beginnings CCM launched serious challenges in the British MX championships and later the GPs.

It was all stirring stuff but cash was not exactly rolling in. In 1982 Clews – rugged individualist and entrepreneur – sold the company to the giant Armstrong group and became just another manager, working unhappily under a succession of bosses who weren't interested in motocross.

Although Armstrong machinery won the British Trials Championship in 1983 and '84 in the unbeatable hands of Steve Saunders, Armstrong switched interest to road racing which swallowed up vast sums of money.

Meanwhile, Clews proved his sales abilities by negotiating huge deals with Can-Am for 4,000 mixed MX, trials and enduro machines and flogged 3,000 to the British military. Armstrong took all the credit for this and CCM wasn't even mentioned when the company won the coveted Queen's Award for Export Achievement.

But Clews won in the end. After some hard negotiation he bought his company back from Armstrong in 1987, reclaimed those three magic initials and resumed production.

In the hands of tough guys like Greg Hanson, Perry Leask, Donny Schmit and Simon Wyse the wins kept coming in four-stroke MX and in 1998 CCM played a starring role in the Dakar Rally. The same year Alan and son Austin sold their majority share in CCM but despite supermoto success and a big screen appearance underneath the luscious, pert, marble-hard buttocks of Angelina Jolie in Tomb Raider the marque hit hard times and closed its doors in 2004.

Step forward again the Clews father and son partnership who together with Alan's son-in-law and current MD Gary Harthern bought back CCM and its assets from liquidators, setting the scene for 2008's MX comeback...

For more on CCM go to www.ccmmotorcyclesuk.com

* Author of among other things, 'Rolling Thunder' – the definitive history of CCM – and DBR editor Sean



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AMERICAN DOL!

IT'S SUPPOSEDLY HARDER TO DEFEND A TITLE THAN IT IS TO WIN ONE IN THE FIRST PLACE BUT BRITAIN'S DAVID KNIGHT IS CONFIDENT HE'LL BE ABLE TO RETAIN HIS US GNCC #1 PLATE

Words and photos by Jonty Edmunds

A dynamic, low-angle photograph of a dirt bike rider leaning into a sharp turn on a dirt track. The rider is wearing a bright orange and red motocross suit, black boots, and a black helmet. The motorcycle is a red and black dual-sport or enduro model. The background is blurred due to motion, emphasizing the speed and agility of the rider.

profile

The big man lets rip as he prepares to defend his GNCC #1 plate

Balls to all that 'it's the journey, not the destination' rubbish – when you race motorcycles for a living you're judged on the end result. Josh Coppins may have lead last year's MX1 world championship by over 100 points but Steve Ramon won the title. And while David Knight didn't dominate last year's GNCC series like we all hoped he would, at the end of the season he was the man on top.

"Last year certainly didn't go to plan," says Knighter, "but I won the championship which is all that really matters. Yeah it would have been nice to have won more races – I know I could have done – but it's who won the championship that'll be remembered."

Last season was full of as many triumphs as it was tribulations for the KTM-mounted Manxman. Coming off a perfect season in the Enduro 3 class of the '06 WEC, David had high hopes of stamping his mark on America's largest off-road racing series. But a hand injury prior to the start of the season, one which severely hampered his preparations ahead of the championship opener, saw the double E3 world champion not only start the year hurt but also unsettled – something that rarely happens to the rock-solid rider.

"Things will be different this year," he reckons. "Last year I spent too much time riding a 250cc two-stroke in extreme races and then getting a bike sorted for Le Touquet. Then I got hurt and things were tough. There's never really a good time to get injured but right before the start of the season is a really bad time to be struggling with things."

"I've only ridden one extreme event so far this year – The Tough One – and competed in one indoor race – The Genoa Indoor Enduro – which I needed to do in order to win the Indoor Enduro World Cup. The rest of the time I've been riding KTM's new four-stroke. I've probably done more riding at home so far this year than I did during the whole of last year."

Knighter is as deadly serious about retaining his GNCC title as he was about winning it in '07, despite his seemingly laidback attitude. Having had to chase last year's title all the way to the 13th and final round in Indiana, DK wants to show this year that he is capable of wrapping up the championship before the end of the season.

"I had a lot of problems last year, silly little problems that stopped me performing better than I did. It sounds like you're making excuses when you have to tell people that you had a problem

with this or that but it was the truth – I did have lots of little problems. It was a tough season last year."

"It seemed to be one step forward, two steps backwards for much of the year. Just when things started going well I'd have something happen that would lose me points. I've lost count of the number of times I thought to myself 'that's it, the bad luck is behind me', only for me to win a race and then again something stupid happen. When you have a few things not go your way it starts to get frustrating. You can't ride at your best when you're wondering what's going to happen next."

While David was soon over his hand injury and having given up trying to get used to a 250cc two-stroke after so many years racing a thumper in the WEC, he certainly wasn't able to take hold of the championship as convincingly as he hoped he would – or like Juha Salminen had in '05 or '06.

"When you replace a rider like Juha you're always going to have a lot to live up to," confesses Knight. "I was seen as the rider that was going to take over and continue to dominate, just like Juha did. When I had problems some people start talking sh*t about me which kind of pissed me off. That's what really fired me up to make sure I won the championship last year."

One of the turning points of Knight's '07 GNCC season was the arrival of a new mechanic. Having a bike underneath him that he had real confidence in helped David work his way back to the top of the championship and ultimately ensured that he won it.

With the US mechanic he started the season with moved aside shortly after the midway point of the series, Timo – the former WEC spannerman from Finland – ensured Knight's 450cc woods weapon performed perfectly. And for '08 Knight has a new mechanic – one he chose himself, one he has confidence in and one who is based in the Isle of Man and not the States.

"When you lose confidence in your mechanic it's hard. Everyone makes mistakes but when it's twice, three times in a season something has to change. This year I have a much better set-up than I did last year which I'm sure will help me ride better. To be honest I did very little riding between races because I had to work on my own practice bikes at home and when you're flying to and from the States all the time you don't have enough time to keep on top of things. >>



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"Whaddya mean you don't like orange!"





Gordy grabs ninth at his first GNCC attempt



TP leads early on until the pace gets to him

GNCCRND 1

OVERALL RESULTS >>

1	David Knight (KTM)	2.48.41
2	Jimmy Jarrett (Suzuki)	2.52.01
3	Garrett Edmisten (Kawasaki)	2.52.04
4	Barry Hawk (Yamaha)	2.52.06
5	Paul Whibley (Suzuki)	2.53.16
9	Gordon Crockard (Husqvarna)	2.57.03



Travis Pastrana and Charlie Mullins fight for the same line through the opening turn

FIRST BLOOD!

KNIGHTER DOMINATES ROUND ONE OF THE US GNCC SERIES IN FLORIDA

Knighter gets the defence of his US GNCC title off to a flying start at the opening round of the '08 series staged in Melbourne, Florida, where he totally trounces the competition.

But things start in the worst possible way as he fails to fire his bike into life as the starter's flag drops which results in the Manxman rounding turn one a country mile behind his XC1 Pro class rivals. Stuck right at the back of the Pro class, DK spends 25 hectic minutes fighting his way forward during the opening lap. With dust a major problem, FMX star Travis Pastrana is the man that quickly establishes himself as the lead rider while the GNCC regulars squabble for positions behind him.

On lap two Pastrana drops one spot as Nate Kanney moves into the lead on his return to GNCC racing after a year in the WEC. But as Kanney and Pastrana battle it out Knighter arrives at the first round of pit stops just seconds behind and then quickly moves into the lead.

From that point on no other rider gets a look in as DK moves further and further ahead with each passing lap. "It was a tough race, especially on the opening lap," comments a relieved Knight from the podium. "The dust was really bad on the first lap but I couldn't back off. I just had to go for it. Once I caught Kanney and Pastrana they moved over and let me by. I just pushed as hard as I could – you couldn't really rest because the track was so rough."

The demanding Triton GNCC circuit takes its toll on several of the expected front runners and come the podium Knight's joined by exhausted Suzuki rider Jimmy

Jarrett and Kawasaki-mounted local star Garrett Edmisten who collapses as he crosses the finish line.

With Knight ending his sixth and final lap close to three-and-a-half minutes ahead of Jarrett, just five seconds separate the second, third and fourth-placed riders with Yamaha's former GNCC champion Barry Hawk just missing out on a podium place.

Newly-signed Suzuki rider Paul Whibley puts in a late race charge to finish fifth, one spot ahead of early race leader Kanney while Pastrana makes it home in 12th position having run out of energy long before the final lap. "I was sure I could run my first lap pace for the entire race," comments an exhausted TP who's barely able to even walk after the race. "I knew I didn't stand a chance of winning but I felt good on lap one and just went for it. I was finished with about one hour still remaining."

Making it two British finishers inside the top 10, Gordon Crockard places ninth in his first US GNCC race. But instead of competing on a BMW as planned, the Crock Star – along with his Aussie team-mate Glenn Kearney – races aboard a Husqvarna, much to everyone's confusion.

"The BMW bikes weren't ready so rather than not compete we're here on Husqvarnas," explains Gordy. "The race was really tough. Everyone kept telling me it would be and they were right. We only got the bikes about a week before the event so they were pretty much standard. More time to get them set-up would have been nice but I know what to expect from GNCC racing now."

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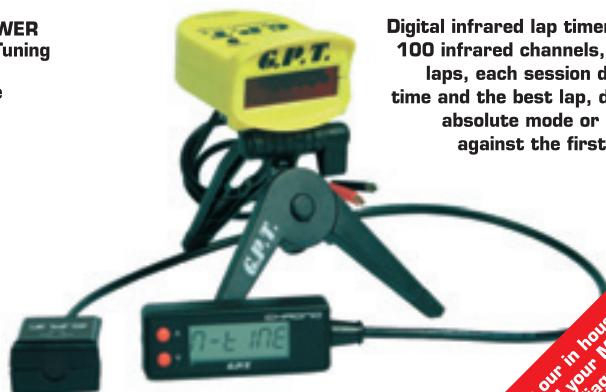
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"Scotty, my new mechanic, lives on the island and will travel with me to all the races in the US. It's great having someone at home. It's like having a small team within a team. I'm able to do what I should be doing and just focus on myself – my training and my riding."

One other thing that has prompted Knight to step up his training both on and off bike is the arrival of KTM's new LC4 motor. Needing to spend time adjusting to and then setting up the new bike, Knight's pre-championship riding programme has become a lot more focused.

"I knew the old bike like the back of my hand," admits David. "I knew how I liked the suspension, I knew how I liked the motor, all I needed to do was race it and do enough training to build up my race fitness. Although I'm still riding a KTM it's like I've started the season on a totally new bike which has been good for me."

"I've had to spend a lot of time riding the bike, setting the bike up – and trying to break it. It's completely new so I knew nothing about it. I can see now that I'd got a bit stale. I really like the bike, we've got it working really well and I've really had to think about how I wanted it set up."

Despite the many dramas that punctuated his '07 GNCC campaign Knight ended the year with no fewer than four championships to his name. This season he'll be happy with two.

"It was bloody hard doing so much last year. The GNCC series was always the priority but winning the Australian Four Day Enduro was great, as was winning the Endurocross championship and the Indoor Enduro World Cup. This year I'm not going to do the Endurocross races, except maybe one or two, because too many of the events clash with GNCC races. It would be just too hard to try and do both again."

"Winning the Endurocross series and the Indoor Enduro World Cup was good because it's something that I don't think anyone else will do, maybe ever. This season I'm really focusing on the GNCC series. I'll do some other races to keep me fresh on a bike and then I'll do the Indoor Enduro World Championship at the end of the year."

The 13 races that stand between Knight and a championship title that he knows he's more

than capable of winning will be different to the 13 races he faced last year due to one simple reason – they won't be new to him in '08.

"It's hard going somewhere you don't know and everyone else you're competing against does. Last year every track was new but this year I'll know what to expect. That has to be an advantage."

So what is it that Knight will have to do in order to successfully defend his GNCC title? "I'm just going to have to be faster than the other guys," he replies with a smile. "No, I'm going to have to ride well, ride consistently and be smart. I know that if I do have problems – a bad race, run out of fuel, have a mechanical problem – it's not the end of the world. I proved last year that I can overcome problems and still win but I'm hoping that this year I will be able to get some good results under my belt early on and then start winning races."

The riders that Knight will have to beat in order to put his name at the top of a second GNCC championship are, more or less, the same as they were last year. One or two have switched teams, one or two are supposedly faster, fitter and better prepared than they were 12 months ago but all things considered nothing's really changed as far as Knight's competition is concerned.

"I don't worry too much about any one rider. I know that there are a few riders that can win races but winning a championship is something several of them haven't been able to do so far."

"People ask me if I feel under any pressure to win again but I see it as the guys that didn't win last year or the two years that Juha was here, they're the ones that are under pressure. I know that I had problems last year but the sh*t some of the riders came out with as to why they didn't win just made me laugh at times."

"I'm going to try and get better starts this year and then just push hard to try and win as many races as I can. I know I can win the championship again. I've worked hard during January and February and I feel good – 13 races spread over eight months makes for a long and difficult championship but I know what to expect this time around."



Knighter fans come in all shapes and sizes





Walker threads his two-fiddy smoker through the trees at Matchams

GBXC OK!

WITH A NEW CROSS COUNTRY SERIES THREATENING TO RAISE THE BAR EVEN HIGHER, GODFREY GETS HIS OIRISH ASS INTO GEAR AND SETS A COURSE FOR MATCHAMS

Words by Geoff Walker Photos by still-mx.co.uk

GNCC British style! It's landed on our shores thanks to the enthusiasm of two of the UK's great minds in off-road racing – Steve Ireland and Paul Edmondson – who have put their heads together and made the magic happen in the form of GBXC.

A four-round televised British off-road series is bang on the money. With popularity growing by the week in multi-hour cross country racing here in the UK it was time to move up to the next level and the guys have hit the target in a lot of departments. This is British three-hour racing at its best with its best!

My invite to the first round of the series at the awesome Matchams Park venue came a couple of days before the event and with the KTM 250 EXC magazine machine – and my body – still bearing a few bruises from The Tough One I wasn't really sure whether to race the event. But my missing hairy boy had popped in an appearance and one look at the little two-fiddy and I could see it wanted to get out on track

again...pesky bike!

The change from the stock off-road gearing on the EXC from 14/50 to 13/50 I'd made for The Tough One made the bike feel great. A little more lively where it needed to be and it helped the power transfer up through the range in a cleaner and more linear form. The little two-fiddy two-smoker has around 50 hours under my large frame in varying types of mud and rock and the total parts used to get it through the winter are one set of fork seals, one rear brake seal kit, front and rear brake pads, two DEP front pipes, two sets of Sunline handguards, one set of Racetech handguards, one set Renthal dual compound grips, one set Smith full waffle soft grips, a clutch lever and three new Twin Air filters.

Elf Oils have been on lubrication duties with the KTM so look out for a couple of product tests with some of their racing products. One stand-out product is the spray-on filter oil. I am not a fan of filter oil in a spray can but the Elf filter oil is simply awesome. Spray it on the filter,



*Team fluffer Spooooooooode
lends a hand in the pits*

work it in, damp it off and fit the thing! Sweet!

With time short before the race, myself and Keith the Legend had a half-hour ride at Marshfield on the MX and enduro tracks. I wanted to see if my body was functioning and KP wanted to test his suspension that I'd tweaked. Both tests were a success and it was off to a superbly sunny Matchams Park to check the track. What a treat was in store...

Steve and his crew of quad guys had laid enough Michelin tape out around the awesome track to circle the UK! There was going to be no-one getting lost or taking 'alternative' routes if they could help it. The circuit wound out from the start on the MX track and then headed off into the woods before taking a trip around the SX track and re-entering the trees. Long wood sections in the sand and dirt offering a good supply of roots would lead into the next sections of dirt tracks with some great downhills and drop-offs. Deep sand whoops winding through the woods with up and downhills would take us back onto the MX track for a blast before

heading into the second set of massive woods. The lap covered approximately six miles and if you were to measure into every sand whoop during the race that distance would probably be doubled!

With Knighter topping the Pro entry and pretty much every top enduro and three-hour racer in the UK present the event was gonna be awesome. The morning saw Vets, Clubmen, Novice and Ladies racing and the action was superb. It was great to see fellow Romaniac Tamsin Jones smoking the women's class after a disastrous start. Good work non-fella!

The afternoon races were for Super Clubmen, Expert and Pro-ranked riders. I was taking a bit of stick for turning up with my bike a little on the, er, muddy side after my test ride and with a little help from Spode, Zee Tree, pocket rocket Chrissee Hammeel and Myles the Pirate the bike was cleaned up and numbered for the race. Team DBR working like a well-oiled machine! Oh yes indeedy! Thank you genitalmen.

The race is a serious thing and this series

more than any other in the UK already seems to have the ability to attract the best riders. TV coverage and cool tracks make this championship really worth winning and the excitement on the start was brilliant.

This is a great opportunity for me to get some vital track time under my belt but for most of the guys in my race it is all business. Knighter owns this kind of racing and even after getting lost on the first lap on the best marked course in history the big man opened a can of whupass on the pack. That's how it works in his team and that's great.

How it works in Team DBR is a little different. I get out of the start, pop up on the pegs and try to enjoy the ride time. The KTM performed flawlessly and it seems to get better with each ride. The power is smoothing out and the chassis is balanced across a wide variety of terrain and the GBXC gave the bike another great test.

A massive well done to every rider at the first round of GBXC and a big thank you to Steve and Paul for taking things to the next level.



TROUBLE-SHOOTING 2!

GODFREY'S BACK WITH MORE TIP-TOP TIPS TO
MAKE YOUR SADDLE TIME GO SMOOTHLY...

Words by Geoff Walker Photo by Sutty

There are a number of sure-fire ways to spoil your day at the track or out on the trails but two of the biggies are too many pies and p**s-poor handling of your motorsickle!

Curing the first ailment is easy. 'Oi, fatty, come out of Greggs with your hands up!' See, easy! That poo-probing 'doctor' off the telly with the dodgy boat race has got nothing on me.

An ill-handling steed's a bit trickier but all is not lost thanks to the second part of Walker's World's trouble-shooting special. This is a rough guide to curing the most basic of handling ills and assuming you're starting with a middle-of-the-road, standard set-up – and 100mm of sag on the rear shock – the tips will make set-up pretty simple in a few common handling situations.

With suspension and chassis set-up it is important to remember that every rider is slightly different and each individual riding style may require slightly different tweaks. With the changes recommended ALWAYS make ONE change at a time and then test the result on

track. No good can come from making too many changes as confusion will reign and you will end up going around in circles.

Sometimes some of the simplest things can cause bad handling characteristics and these points are sometimes overlooked as the 'tuners' are too quick to get the major suspension tweaks under way.

The first common cause of a dodgy handling bike can be as simple as incorrect tyre pressures. If the tyres are too soft the bike will wallow around a little and give negative feedback to the rider. Similarly, if the tyres are too hard then a lack of grip will cause major problems in handling. Try to run the front and rear tyres at 12psi whenever it is good conditions and 14psi if things get a little rocky.

Another simple nightmare for handling can be if the steering is too stiff. This can be caused by damaged head race bearings or simply the lock nut under the top clamp being over tightened. The bars should move freely with just a tiny amount of resistance.

Your wheels are another place to check if things are not going smoothly in the handling department. If either or both wheels have sideways play in them things will go wrong. The movement is caused by worn wheel bearings. If the movement is coming from the swingarm then your main pivot bearings are shot which will have a serious effect on overall handling. Check your rims for big dings and dents, these will make the wheels run out of true and will effect grip and handling.

If you find your bike pulling to one side for no reason this can be pretty serious. The front and rear wheels may not be aligned correctly, you may have a bent frame or swingarm, bent axles, broken shock absorber or even bent forks. These are pretty major problems.

The following points are some of the most common handling dilemmas so stick to this simple guide, work methodically, make sure your tyres are suited to the ground and you will make your bike handle like a dream...

Are you sitting comfortably? Then we'll begin!



WAKKA! THE FRONT END'S TURNING TOO SHARP

- 1) Raise the fork oil level (eg 10cc or 10mm)
- 2) Use stiffer fork springs

WAKKA! THE FRONT END'S PUSHING AWAY

- 1) Lower the fork oil level (eg 10cc or 10mm)
- 2) Use softer fork springs

WAKKA! THE FRONT IS WANDERING AROUND UNDER POWER

- 1) Raise the fork oil level
- 2) Preload the rear shock some more (eg one complete turn)

WAKKA! THE FRONT SHAKES WHEN I BRAKE HARD INTO A TURN

- 1) Take some preload off the rear shock (eg one complete turn)
- 2) Go in a couple of clicks on rebound damping on the shock (eg two clicks clockwise)
- 3) Raise the fork oil level

WAKKA! THE FRONT HOPS OVER SMALL BUMPS IN SMOOTHER TURNS

- 1) Lower the fork oil level
- 2) Back off on the forks' compression damping (eg two clicks anti-clockwise)
- 3) Switch to softer springs
- 4) Use lighter viscosity fork oil (eg from 5wt to 2.5wt)

WAKKA! MY REAR END'S HOPPING OVER BUMPS WHEN I OPEN HER UP

- 1) Back off on the shock preload
- 2) Back the shock off a couple of turns on compression damping

WAKKA! THE REAR WON'T HOOK UP OUT OF TURNS

- 1) Back off an extra couple of clicks on shock compression
- 2) Decrease the shock preload
- 3) GET A NEW REAR TYRE AND GET ON WITH IT!

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RYAN THORPE

SWORDY'S SPANNER SPINNER ON LIFE ON THE ROAD (AND BARBIES BY THE SIDE OF IT)...

Words and photo by JP O'Connell

In the US on the AMA tour the mechanics of some of the top-flight racers are almost as famous as their riders but the technicians on the GP tour don't seem to be as recognised. In the first of a new (ir)regular feature, we took the opportunity to find out a bit more about Swordy's mechanic for 2008, 20-year-old Ryan Thorpe.

DBR: When and where did you get into bike mechanics?

RT: "It all started out in 2000 when I used to help out my granddad, Keith, on the CAT Honda Team. Funnily enough Stephen was on the team at the time but I was mainly cleaning boots and things like that! As soon as I left school I began a three-year apprenticeship at Albion in Exeter and gained my NVQ 2+3 as well as doing some technical courses with KTM."

DBR: Who have you previously spannered for?

RT: "I've worked with Stephen Clarke at PAR Honda, Jordan Rose at Meredith Honda and Jake Nicholls at Fork Rent Suzuki."

DBR: How did the move to Molson come about?

RT: "I was working with Jake Nicholls last season and he has now moved to Swift Suzuki, I had an option to go with him but it just didn't quite work out. Then I was approached by Molson and it went from there."

DBR: Did you know who you'd be spannering for when you signed?

RT: "No, I didn't find out until three weeks after I signed but I wouldn't have minded who it was for."

DBR: How is Swordy to work with?

RT: "On a professional level we get on really well. We've known each other for 12 years so we can have a laugh together but we knuckle down and get the job done."

DBR: How does he compare to other riders you've worked with?

RT: "My job is made easier as he's so experienced. When there is a problem he can explain exactly what's wrong and what he wants. Sometimes people with less experience know there's a problem but can't quite put their finger on it which can be a bit difficult."

DBR: What have you been up to during the off-season?

RT: "I've been maintaining Steve's practice bikes. He rides twice a week at the moment so I make sure the bikes are all together and ready to go."

DBR: Now that you are working for a factory team do you feel nervous or under pressure going into 2008?

RT: "No, I'm not nervous at all – in fact I can't wait for the season to begin."

DBR: How will working for Molson differ from working for Fork Rent Suzuki?



RT: "At Fork Rent I was responsible for working on the engines and suspension as well as the rest of the chassis. At Molson they have their own engine and suspension guys."

DBR: Where will you be based throughout the season?

RT: "Molson have their workshop in Belgium, just outside of Lommel."

DBR: Once the season begins how long are you away from home?

RT: "I'll be away for 10 months but I'll be in the UK for the rounds of the British championship."

DBR: What will a typical week consist of during the season?

RT: "Depending on where the GP is we will get back to Belgium Monday or Tuesday. It then takes one to two days to strip and rebuild the bikes – every single nut and bolt is checked. Once the bikes are done the truck and awnings are cleaned before everything is loaded on board and we head off to the next GP on either the Thursday or Friday."

DBR: Is there anything that you don't enjoy about your job?

RT: "I enjoy everything about it, even the travelling. When I turn 21 I will hopefully get my HGV licence and start moving the truck about."

DBR: How important is the rider/mechanic relationship?

RT: "It's important to have a good personal relationship, to be able to speak freely about things and feel comfortable together. When Steve is practising I will watch his lines and point out where he may benefit. As a mechanic as long as the bike is 100 per cent as good as it can be then the rest is up to the rider."

DBR: Any good road trip stories – one's that you can tell us about anyway?

RT: "You know how it is, what happens on the road stays on the road! But this one time while driving through the Czech Republic we were all hungry so we pulled onto the hard shoulder of the motorway, flashed up the barbie and had some breakfast sat on the edge of the carriageway!"

DBR: How long do you see yourself doing this job – as a single man it must be awesome but I imagine that if you meet someone it may not be so great?

RT: "I definitely see myself doing it for a few years. I'd also like to try a year in the US, just to see what it's like. As for girls, I'll have to see if I can find a Belgian one!"

DBR: Cheers Ryan and good luck in the future.

RT: "Thanks JP!"

The trials world was shocked when Dougie, after eight loyal years on the HRC Montesa, was judged to be surplus to requirements



© Honda images

MEALS on WHEELS?

Words and photos by Ed Dole

AFTER BEING DROPPED BY THE HRC MONTESA TEAM AT THE END OF '07, 12-TIME WORLD TRIALS CHAMP DOUGIE LAMPKIN – BY FOUR YEARS THE ELDER STATESMAN OF THE WTC – IS BACK WITH BETA AND STILL HUNGRY FOR THAT ELUSIVE 100TH GP WIN...BUT CAN HE DELIVER?

On March 23 Dougie Lampkin will reach the grand old age of 32. By Premiership League footie standards he's still got a few seasons left in him but in the world of top-flight international trials he's already very much the elder statesman, a full four years older than ex-Repsol team-mate Takahisa Fujinami who's next in line for senior citizen status.

Despite not having added another world title since 2004 to his mighty tally of 12 – and having been stuck on 99 GP victories

for over a year – many predicted that Lampkin would see his career out with Honda. Surely that was the least Big Red could do in return for his eight years loyal service, for the four world titles he brought to the team and for his major role in developing their first serious four-stroke trials bike in 20 years?

But Dougie was forced to look elsewhere for a ride in 2008. A return to his Italian roots was the worst kept secret this winter but when the official word about his Beta contract was finally issued it was met with

great optimism by the many Dougie fans across the world. Unfortunately, with limited time to develop his new two-stroke mount and with some initial below par performances during his first few less-favoured indoor events over the last two months, Dougie's homecoming has been far from ideal.

Not wanting to kick a good man when he's down, DBR treated DL to a pint of mild and a packet of pork scratchings and gave the world's most successful ever trials rider the chance to tell his side of the tale... >>

*Deja vu? Dougie's back on
a two-stroke Beta for '08*



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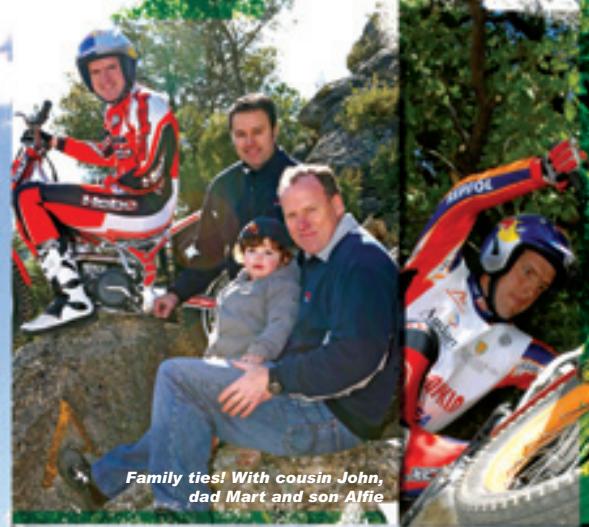
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DBR: From our previous conversations it seemed that you would remain at Montesa to the end of your riding career and perhaps beyond in some kind of development/figurehead role. So what changed?

DL: "I was at Montesa for eight years and the plan was, or what I was sort of led to believe, that I would be continuing with the team when I'd finished riding. A lot of people said that 2007 could be my last year but it never really came from my side, it was just rumours. I thought that I was going to be kept on in the team in some sort of development role after I finished riding but during the middle of the year it looked like things were changing and nothing was ever really put in place, certainly nothing in black and white."

"Then when I was told the week before the outdoor Trials des Nations that I wouldn't be offered a contract, obviously that closed the door at Montesa. I had two options, to either retire or continue riding. So I called Beta to see what they thought and it all just came into place pretty much immediately."



Dougie made his name riding for Beta in the '90s



DBR: You must have been shocked not to have been offered another contract after eight loyal years and having won them four world titles?

DL: "Yeah it was a little bit disappointing not to be offered a contract. I've ridden for them for eight years, obviously won the outdoor titles four times, the indoor title two times and two Spanish titles plus some British championships. I've sort of done everything really but I suppose like they say all good things come to an end. It's a business decision, if there are cutbacks to be made throughout any company then people have to go and I was one of those people."

DBR: With no Montesa ride did you ever consider perhaps it might have been the right time to retire?

DL: "I've never really considered retiring yet. I've always said that while I continue to enjoy riding like I do at the moment then I won't consider it. I still enjoy riding a bike as much now as I always have done. There were rumours I would retire because my results weren't perfect but I am still enjoying riding so I have decided to continue."

DBR: Beta have both two-stroke and four-stroke models so surely it would have made more sense to ride their four-stroke after having spent the last three years on a similar machine?

DL: "It's probably the most commonly asked question – why two-stroke and not four-stroke – and it's fairly easy really. The four-stroke is coming along really, really well and possibly faster than what anybody is expecting. Beta have put a lot of work into it but I rode both bikes in a test and decided to take the two-stroke. I think it was going to be easier to get on with straight away and sort of easier to work with but the door is open really to ride either machine and maybe that will come in the future."

DBR: What are the major differences you have noticed so far about being back on a two-stroke?

DL: "There are some big differences about going back to the two-stroke but I think the main difference is obviously changing machine. The Beta is a very different bike and going back to the two-stroke is obviously an added thing. The problem is now that you just don't seem to have

any time to adapt to it. You get thrown straight into the competition less than two weeks after the start of the year. It's a very fast learning process and not a very easy one when all first competitions are indoors which is not the most forgiving environment for a learner rider like me!"

DBR: How competitive do you believe you can be this season outdoors as it's fair to say that the indoor series has not gone to plan so far?

DL: "The indoor season hasn't gone well at all really. We're struggling with various things and trying to improve things as fast as we can but like I said things just seem to come up too quickly. But when I'm practising outdoor I feel much more comfortable and it's no secret it's always been my more favoured side of the sport where I feel that I can still be competitive. I'm always looking to win, certainly looking for my 100th GP win, so I don't see any problem with taking some podiums."

DBR: At 32 years old do you think this will be your last season riding at the top level? >>

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Lampkin's comeback second lap at Hawkstone in '05 was the stuff of legend and won him the trial



MEAN

DL: "It's difficult to say if this is going to be my last year and, like I said, I just want to continue riding while I'm enjoying it. But if the results start dropping off then I know I'm not going to enjoy it so I won't continue like that. But it's difficult to say – I'm the eldest in the championship by over four years but I want to continue riding as long as I can. So it will either be this year or maybe another year, something like that. But it's too early to say. I don't want to say that I'm going to retire and then decide to continue riding again, especially at this stage of the season."

DBR: After having not ridden the SSDT since 1996 do you think you can make a winning return or are you just going to be riding for fun? **DL:** "I'm really looking forward to returning to the Scottish, to ride with all my family and with all my friends and everything. It's been a long time since I last rode and the event is supposed to be just for fun but I know that when it actually starts I'll be as competitive as ever. I've been away for a long time and feel that I want to return and feel like I'm missing out on something – especially when all the family are preparing and also when they're riding and talking about it afterwards."

DBR: With your second child due around the Scottish and your son Alfie now two-and-a-half years old, what impact has being a father had on your life?

DL: "Obviously it's been a massive change. Nicola's expecting another child at the end of April which will be another massive change. Everything that you thought was important before doesn't really come into it. Now the priority in my life is my family whereas before the priority in my life was definitely my career. But since I've got married and started to have a

family I have certainly changed in my whole approach to things, hopefully for the better."

DBR: How good is Toni Bou? Would you dare to say he is even better than your dad was back in his day?

DL: "There is certainly no question, Toni is riding absolutely fantastic. I mean you could see in Sheffield that he put on a show for the crowd and it was fantastic for everybody to see. He is certainly a worthy world champion and a genuinely nice lad which is always nice to see as well. It's difficult to say if he was better than anybody who has been before because it's obviously different times and things have changed. He certainly is something special but we knew that quite a few years ago as he was coming up through the ranks."

DBR: If you could have your time over again is there anything you would change about your career?

DL: "No, certainly not. When you're growing up as a kid you just want to be world champion and I've been lucky enough that not only have I done that but I've done that several times. I've been awarded the MBE, I've won national championships in England and Spain and more indoor and outdoor trials than anybody else so I wouldn't really change anything."

"It's been far more than what I could have ever dreamed of and being able to make your hobby into your work is something that not many people have the opportunity to do. I feel that I've had a fantastic time, without doubt."

DBR: There are rumours circulating that you may even try your hand at some extreme enduros – are they true?

DL: "There's quite a few trials riders who are experimenting with extreme enduros. Taddy Blazusiak has just stopped riding world trials and has gone really well. It's something that Red Bull have had a bit of an idea about and said they would be interested in me trying my hand at which seems like a really good idea."

"So if the calendar allows towards the end of this year I will possibly ride in some Red Bull events and I think I will really enjoy it. I don't expect any fantastic results, I just think it's an opportunity to try something that I might really enjoy and haven't really had the time to do before."

DBR: So exactly how do you plan to spend your retirement?

DL: "Obviously the best thing will be not travelling all the time so I will be able to spend more time with the family and that will be fantastic. Apart from that I have not given it any real thought but perhaps I should."

DBR: What plans do you have for your father once you have finished taking him around the world?

DL: "I don't think he'll be doing his third lap with anybody else. It's been a fantastic time during my career that I've been able to go with my father and have had a great working relationship with him. I have learnt so much from him due to his own personal experiences, especially how to cope under pressure. However I think we'll be keeping him quite busy because his grandsons are into their pushbikes. The eldest two have already started riding in bicycle trials so he's going to have plenty on his plate – don't worry too much about him being sat at home with his feet up in front of the fire."

MAX POWER!

THE STAND-OUT STAR OF LAST YEAR'S PRE-SEASON INTERNATIONALS, MAX NAGL'S 2007 CAMPAIGN WAS OVER BY MAY. BUT THIS YEAR THE MAN KTM ARE PINNING ALL THEIR MX1 HOPES ON HAS STEFAN EVERTS AND PIT BEIRER IN HIS CORNER...

Words and photos by ALEX HODGKINSON

Max Nagl will carry a heavy weight on his shoulders in 2008. The 20-year-old Bavarian is not only the youngest contender, he is KTM's only full-factory rider in MX1 this year. We spoke to him at Mantova.

DBR: How does it feel to be a factory rider?

MN: "Cool. The entire Red Bull KTM team was in Spain together last month and the difference to being a support rider was immediately clear. I have two mechanics – at the races I have Peter Tillerqvist who worked for Philippaerts last year and Dave Geurts, a Belgian guy who is new in the team, will prepare my practice bike."

DBR: You had the chance of a factory engine last year but you preferred to stick with your Sarholz engine. How is that now?

MN: "Much better. The factory has dramatically improved the engine. The basis was already better than before even though it was not as strong as my '07 race engine but we have now increased the power. Most important, however, the new motor has a completely different power delivery – it is much smoother and suits me perfectly."

"I don't know what they changed but I couldn't and wouldn't tell if I knew. I gave them my feedback about the way it felt and the engineers made the changes. There were five of them there and that is their job, just like it is mine to race and tell them my impressions. The bike suits me perfectly now so it's down to me to get the results."

"The frame is also new this year with a different geometry and the weight distribution has been altered. It felt better from the word go, though I did have to get used to it and actually needed to change my riding style. But it was worth it. I feel even better comfortable on the bike than before, a genuine advance."

"I don't know what the weight is, though we are not down at 102kg like last year. But I don't need that. I rode with 115kg last year and didn't have any problems. I think we are somewhere around 105-106kg but I don't think we will be looking to trim off any more weight. That could affect the stability of the bike. I'd rather have a few kilos more and not risk losing that!"

DBR: You are KTM's only full-factory rider in MX1 this year.

Does that worry you?

MN: "No, not at all – in fact it is a bonus. I have been able to get a set-up exactly the way I want it with no compromises."

DBR: But don't you feel more pressure?

MN: "No way, in fact it suits me better this way. I see the pressure which Tommy, Tyla and Rui are building up among themselves, each of them equally fast and each determined to be number one in the team. The pressure doesn't come from above on them but is built up from below among themselves. Each one is trying to see what the other is doing and gain from it."

DBR: What are your expectations for this year?

MN: "Neither KTM nor myself have entered the numbers game. First let's get the season under way, after a couple of races we will know where we stand."

DBR: Last year you were an overwhelming winner in Mantova, then out for the season at the start of May. We guess you want 2008 to run a different course...

MN: "For sure. But we already took measures to turn that around. Last year I started training on the bike in December and I mean intensive training. This year I didn't ride at all until the middle of January, except for a bit of trail riding in the woods. I had three months off the bike and I have to admit I was sceptical if that would work for me – even with my injuries over the years I've never been off a bike for so long before and I wasn't sure if I would be able to find my rhythm again."

"But I see now that I was much too far into my training much too early last year. Stefan and Pit insisted that I change that and I can see they were right. I quickly got back into my rhythm and I don't have the danger of burn-out."

"I am nowhere near as fit here in Mantova as I was last year when I won the race. I could already race flat-out for two times 40 minutes by the middle of February last year but the season doesn't start in earnest until April 6 in Valkenswaard – by then I will be ready, still not 100 per cent but ready to race at the front – and the aim is to start to peak in May and June."

DBR: Who do you train with?

MN: "My training on the bike is with Stefan but I have my own physical trainer back home at the fitness studio for athletes. But Stefan has given us targets to reach from his experience over the years."

DBR: How do you feel about the proposed switch from 450 to 350 in 2010?

MN: "Personally I hope the 350 never comes but if it does I will have to adapt. But I hope I don't need to, the 450 is much better. I'm not the biggest guy in the world but I don't have any problem with the 450. There are some other riders – Barragan for example – who never ride anything but wide open, into the turn, clutch, full throttle. The bikes are getting ever more powerful and you cannot ride like that, you are right out of your depth."

"What is needed is a smooth riding style like Stefan, then you get the best from a 450. The throttle works both ways and you have to adapt when you step up from MX2. Some riders don't want to, or can't, do that. You can't throw a 450 around like a 250, it is too strong and will spit you off but when you learn to ride a 450 properly there is no more wonderful feeling in the world. The rider is the deciding factor in MX1 and we are supposed to be racing for the riders' world championship, aren't we?"

DBR: Is there a revival of the sport in Germany?

MN: "Yeah. I'm a factory rider now, we always knew that Markus Schiffer would be good and I'm keeping my fingers crossed for Kenny Roczen. He needs three or four years yet but then he can be right at the front in MX2 and we will have three world class riders again. And I intend to make sure Max Nagl's performance gets better and better!"



Max chases after new factory Yamaha signing David Philippaerts

As the sole factory KTM MX1 rider, Max Nagl's hoping team sponsor Red Bull really will give him wings





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An eye problem cut short Langston's
'08 supercross campaign



MIXED FORTUNES!

HE'S THE MOST SUCCESSFUL SMALL-BORE RIDER ON THE PLANET – AND HAS PROVED HIS WORTH ON A 450 AS WELL – BUT LIFE NEVER SEEMS TO BE SO SMOOTH FOR GRANT LANGSTON...

Grant Langston is simultaneously the luckiest and unluckiest rider in the AMA paddock. On one hand he seems to be in the right place at the right time a lot in order to win as many championships as he has – including a world 125cc championship, an AMA 125cc National championship, two Lites SX championships and now a 450cc National MX championship.

However, on the other hand, when he's not winning championships it seems like he's always fighting some ailment or injury. Even though he came into this year's SX season healthy he dropped out after only a few rounds with an eye problem that he picked up early in the series.

DBR: A lot of people tend to forget but last season was not your first attempt at racing outdoors on a 450 was it?

GL: "No but it's still a big deal, just because a lot of people didn't think I could do it. To go back in time a little bit, I don't like to bash companies because at the end of the day they pay our salaries and they provide the living that we have but at the same time it gets to a point where you can't say there's nothing wrong with the bike when you're not finishing races because you're getting thrown off and stuff. I really felt that KTM came in way under-prepared and they under-estimated supercross."

"I almost felt that some of the engineers in Austria got a little bit too cocky because the whole KTM company was blowing up worldwide and they went from listening to not listening. There were no parts and the bike wasn't right and there was nothing they could do about it."

"The AMA has a production rule. In the GPs if your frame sucks you get a new one. Here if your frame sucks just ride out the season and hope that it's better next year. For me it was really frustrating and tough and I lost motivation

in '04 and got carpal-tunnel [syndrome] because the bike vibrated so much. I didn't even ride the outdoors. I rode half a moto and couldn't finish and just said 'that's it, I can't handle this anymore'. I think they [KTM] looked at it like I was quitting or being a baby but if you can't feel your throttle hand on a 450 outdoors you wouldn't want to be out there either."

DBR: At the same time it got around that maybe Grant Langston wasn't motivated or wasn't tough enough...

GL: "People are very wishy-washy. You win one race and then they say 'man, you're so fit, strong, motivated, fast...we knew this was going to happen'. Then, the next week, the same people walk right past you to the guy that won that weekend and tell him the same things. It kind of burns you out sometimes but I do believe that there are some people who are smart and see through that and one of those people was Mitch Payton."

"When he knew that I was struggling and down he said 'I want you on my team'. He asked me 'are you motivated, are you ready to win?' and I said to him 'Mitch, I promise you, if you give me the equipment I'll win for you'. I signed for him for a lot less money than I had been getting but at that time I didn't really care too much. I just wanted to win. And Mitch said to me 'my goal for you is that you win for me and then move up – get your career back on track and then be where you belong on the big bikes and on a factory team'."

"And that's pretty much the angle that both of us were coming from. But at the same time, when I was in the Lites class, I was called a sandbagger and this and that but I said 'hey, there's no age limit and I'm not even the oldest guy by the way'. But, at the same time, people are quick to point fingers.

"It's kind of a compliment because if you're not a sandbagger that means ▶"

Racer X's editors at large. He knows the sport and its personalities like few others and as our US Editor provides insight straight from the Stateside scene... We love the Cox!

Steve Cox is an American moto-journalist who follows the entire AMA SX/MX tour. Since moving on from US weekly Cycle News he's struck out on his own to do the freelance thing and recently became one of

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The most successful small-bore rider on the planet, Grant added the 2007 AMA Motocross title to his collection of crowns



you're not winning and no-one cares. When my two years were coming up I looked at my options and Yamaha was my best option. I think that they believed that I could do well but it wasn't the easiest transition. Yamaha is a big corporation where Pro Circuit is a small, independent team. Things happen slower, they happen differently and it took me a while to get used to the big bike on a supercross track. The frame wasn't quite to my liking and I'd come off a broken ankle and hadn't been riding plus I got a late start because my Kawasaki contract didn't end until the end of October.

"I only got on a Yamaha in November and to be honest it was tough because I was working on the bike and the next thing was it was Anaheim. I wasn't where I wanted to be and I was a little frustrated and I didn't really know what to do to make the bike better. No matter what we did it seemed like there was always the same problem which was that it wouldn't turn. I think they thought I was a little crazy because Chad [Reed] didn't struggle with it too much but I think his style is a little bit different."

DBR: It's weird that you're only 25 years old but people think you're older.

GL: "When I was winning the West Coast championship I was 23 and I was a sandbagger. I'm like 'hang on, Andrew Short's older than me, Nathan Ramsey's older than me...the only guy who's anywhere near us on the track who's younger than me is Villopoto. I'm the second-youngest guy in the top seven in points but I'm a sandbagger?" I didn't quite gather that but the Lites class doesn't have an age limit. Only recently they brought rules in. I did what I had to do – it was one of the few options I had and it revitalized my racing career."

DBR: If you didn't have that opportunity to ride the Lites class again you may not even be here right now which could be the problem with the new rules.

GL: "I could've been stuck on some B-grade team finishing eighth or ninth and just scrapping around to try and get any sort of an opportunity with a factory team. Personally, I think the rules in the Lites class are dumb. I don't think that someone like Ryan Villopoto should be forced to move up just because he won a supercross championship last year. He's young, he's small... You know what? If they can't beat him [they should] pick up the pace."

"It's the same with James Stewart except there's no class that he can move into. If no-one takes it to him he'll dominate our sport like Ricky did. My opinion is that if Ryan Villopoto wants to spend the rest of his career in the Lites class there shouldn't be anything that stops him. At the end of the day, the money's in the bigger class. Everyone wants to move up."

DBR: So what's going on with your eye ailment now?

GL: "Obviously, I had the eye situation and I had several opinions but it was supposedly fixed with a laser procedure only for me to find that my eyesight got worse afterward. I went in for my week-after check-up and my vision had deteriorated from 20/60 to 20/150. I just went back there yesterday and I'm back to 20/60 which is how I was about three weeks ago."

"Some people say that with trauma to the eye it tends to get worse before it gets better so hopefully that's what it is. Every day, actually, for the last four or five days I've been making baby-step improvements. It's frustrating because I had surgery on my wrist and hand that has been giving me trouble for years and the day after surgery it's huge and swollen and I can't move it. But now, 10 days later, it's almost ready to go ride."

"So you get huge improvements on something like that and then this eye problem nothing happens that quickly at all. It all takes so long to notice improvements."

#8

GRANT LANGSTON

The Supercross big-hitters get ready for the start of the Indy Main Event





SITTING PRETTY!

IT'S HARDLY BEEN PLAIN SAILING BUT WITH THE SERIES PASSING THE HALFWAY MARK IT'S CHAD REED WHO'S OUT IN FRONT OF THE AMA SX TITLE CHASE

Only five rounds into the 2008 Monster Energy/AMA Supercross Championship it looked all over for everyone but San Manuel Yamaha's Chad Reed. At that point Reed had won four of the first five races and the other winner – Monster Energy Kawasaki's James Stewart – had dropped out of the series after only two rounds. The result was huge points lead very early in the title chase.

But as we saw with the AMA Nationals last year, sometimes the exit of someone as dominant as Stewart encourages many of the other riders to think of victory as a realistic goal. At the same time a rider like Chad – who spent the whole off-season looking forward to 'stepping up' to race a rider like James – will sometimes slow down a bit, believing that he has everyone else covered.

At round six, one of the AMA young guns seems determined to step it up and race with Reed. Honda Red Bull Racing's Davi Millsaps grabs the Main Event holeshot and even though Reed is right on his tail he can't get by. Reed finally makes the pass and begins to pull away, only to go down in the sand in the first turn to hand the lead back to Millsaps. But Millsaps has got stomach cramps and as they worsen Reed makes quick work of him once he catches back up. So Reed takes the win – his fifth in the six races run so far.

"I was horrible all day and I'm so happy to get this win," Reed says. "I got out front and Davi got me back and I knew I needed to get in behind him and let the race get a few laps deep and then try and make a pass and make a break. I got a pretty decent gap and then I just lost concentration and lost it. But I'm pumped to get another win in San Diego and to win all of the rounds in

California – I don't think anyone else has ever done that before."

From here the series heads to Houston, Texas, for the last round of the Western swing of the series and to a track that was designed prior to the start of the season by Torco Racing Fuels Honda's Kevin Windham. Millsaps grabs yet another holeshot to start the Main with Windham right on his tail while Reed starts outside the top 10. Within a couple of laps Windham makes a pass stick for the lead and he immediately begins to pull away. Reed finally finds his way into second place at the halfway point but Windham's too far gone and wins his first Main Event since the series opener in 2005.

"It just seemed like it took a long time," Windham says. "It was a tough race because it would've been easy to let your mind wander and I stayed focused. I kept myself calm and calculated. It felt good to actually inch away from him a little bit. When he was in second I felt like I was inching away."

It's only Reed's second loss of the season but the Aussie's not happy. "That's a tough one to swallow," reckons Reed. "I think it just eventually caught up to me. I gave it everything I've got but Kevin rode a good race and I want to congratulate him. But that's a disappointment. We've had a good season and it's still good to be up on the podium. Once I got into second I couldn't cut into Kevin's lead. He rode a good race."

In Atlanta Reed finds it in him to claw his way up to the lead off of the start with Millsaps on his tail and he immediately begins to inch away until five laps in when he makes a huge mistake over one of the track's 'walls of death' and goes over the bars, handing the lead to Millsaps. Reed remounts in 11th. ▶



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SERIES STANDINGS

SUPERCROSS

1	Chad Reed	209 points
2	Kevin Windham	175
3	Andrew Short	141
4	Timmy Ferry	137
5	Davi Millsaps	127
6	Nate Ramsey	114
7	Josh Hill	106
8	David Vuillemin	84
9	Nick Wey	84
10	Paul Carpenter	81

Millsaps and Reed were so far out front that Millsaps now finds himself all alone so it's up to him to just finish the job and take his first-ever 450cc win. And that's exactly what he does, handing yet another defeat to Reed who can only manage to catch back up to sixth. Windham is second and Millsaps' team-mate Andrew Short is third.

"It was added pressure when he [Chad Reed] went down because I knew that I could win then," Millsaps says. "It was just a matter of me keeping it on two wheels."

With his second-place finish, Windham moves to within 25 points of Reed going into Indianapolis – the track that Reed designed. Sick of losing, Reed leaves nothing to interpretation in the Main Event as he grabs the holeshot and promptly checks out in one of his most dominant performances of the year. He wins by more than 10 seconds over Yamaha's Josh Hill, Short, Rockstar/Makita Suzuki's Ryan Dungey in his 450cc debut and Windham.

"It was better than the last few weeks, that's for sure," Reed says. "I mean, when you look at a second and a sixth being bad it's not that bad but it really sucked ass. It didn't feel so good. You need to do that every once in a while, I guess, to get the motivation back up and refocus. I think this week was a good week. We got to deal with a lot of the issues that I've been having since Anaheim and I came out and had fun on my track and got it done."

With the win, Reed's points lead is extended back out to 34 points over Windham with only eight rounds left to run.



Kevin Windham (#14) is a popular winner in Texas





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Trey Canard is a surprise hero as the Eastern Region Lites series starts up

WEST TO EAST!

AS ONE SERIES COMES CLOSE TO AN EPIC CONCLUSION ANOTHER STARTS UP

After winning two races in a row and pulling to within striking distance of championship rival Ryan Dungey, Jason Lawrence heads into San Diego with momentum and confidence and promptly rips the holeshot from the outside to start the Main Event and leads every lap while Dungey crashes twice on his way to finishing sixth.

After San Diego Dungey trails in the championship for the first time, sitting two points behind Lawrence. Determined to turn his luck around, Dungey grabs the holeshot to start the Houston Main, leads the first lap and then throws it away in the whoops which not only costs him the lead but blocks Brett Metcalfe and hands the lead to Lawrence. Lawrence leads the next few laps while Dungey crashes a second time. Eventually Lawrence gives way to Pro Circuit rookie Austin Stroupe who goes on to win his first-ever Main Event. Lawrence finishes second while Dungey recovers for fourth, thanks in part to a last lap crash by Metcalfe.

Still, the damage is done. Going into the Western Regional finale in Seattle at the end of April, Dungey trails Lawrence by six points meaning that all Lawrence needs to do in order to win the title is finish third or better. In order for Dungey to win the title he needs to win and hope that Lawrence finishes outside the top three.

When asked if he was just riding smart and settled for second in Houston, Lawrence has much to say. "I think that might be my 'A' game, being smart – something Dungey hasn't been all year," Lawrence says. "That's four races in a row that he's crashed out. He's handing me this title and I've got one more race to hold it together. I'm going to go to that race and do exactly what I did right here. Dungey can win it by a mile but I'm going to get the title."

From Houston the Lites series heads East and a whole new crop of riders gets set to go after the Eastern Regional SX crown. The obvious favourite is Monster Energy/Pro Circuit Kawasaki's Ryan Villopoto but he's still recovering from wrist surgery going into the opener in Atlanta and another young redhead steals his thunder.

Torco Racing Fuels Honda's Trey Canard grabs the holeshot at round one and performs a disappearing act, winning his first supercross in his first attempt – and leading every lap in both his heat race and the Main Event – while Villopoto crashes out. "Man, I'm fortunate," Canard says. "I'm blessed in many ways and it's not just me that did that – there was a lot of hard work and dedication behind me. It's a long series and I want to concentrate on that."

At round two in Indianapolis Villopoto looks like he's back to his old ways. He's fastest in practice and he wins his heat race. Canard also leads every lap of his heat race so the stage is set for a clash of the copperheads in the Main Event. Canard grabs the lead out the gate while Villopoto starts third behind team-mate Branden Jesseman. Villopoto dispatches Jesseman on lap three and then heads off after the fleeing Canard.

At the end of lap six Villopoto catches Canard and then attempts to make a pass going down the start straight but falls in spectacular fashion instead, knocking down Canard in the process. Canard loses the lead for one lap but then passes Jesseman back and goes on to win his second Main Event in a row while Villopoto recovers to make a last-lap pass for second on Nico Izzi.

"I'm pumped," Canard says. "It's going really well so far. I know it could be going a lot worse. I'm trying to keep my head down and keep focused. I know it's a seven-race series and I want to be as prepared as I can possibly be. I made probably 10 or 12 mistakes in that Main Event but, like I said, I just want to give it everything I've got every time I'm out there."

So Canard leads the championship by 14 over Ryan Sipes while Villopoto sits 28 points back with only five rounds to make up the gap.



With just the final round to run, Jason Lawrence leads the Western Region Lites division



A series of falls have cost Ryan Dungey his Western Region Lites championship lead

SERIES STANDINGS

LITES WEST

LITES EAST

	LITES WEST	LITES EAST
1	Jason Lawrence 135 points	1 Trey Canard 50 points
2	Ryan Dungey 129	2 Ryan Sipes 36
3	Austin Stroupe 113	3 Martin Davalos 33
4	Brett Metcalfe 112	4 Nico Izzi 33
5	Tommy Hahn 101	5 Tyler Bowers 31
6	Dan Reardon 95	6 Branden Jesseman 30
7	Justin Brayton 85	7 Ben Coisy 29
8	Robert Kiriny 71	8 Jake Moss 28
9	Will Hahn 69	9 Josh Grant 23
10	Billy Laninovich 62	10 Ryan Villopoto 22

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REGRESSION!

WATCHING A RETRO SX DVD BOX-SET HAS MADE OUR CANADA GUY ALL NOSTALGIC FOR HIS CHILDHOOD – Y'KNOW, MAPLE SYRUP, ICE HOCKEY, KIDS OF DEGRASSI ST, EUROPEAN GPS...

Words by STEVE MATTHES Photo by JACK BURNICLE

When you guys get your greasy fish n' chips soiled hands on this incredible issue of DBR the riders will be over halfway through the Monster Energy SX series. It always starts out as an exciting time for every moto fan across the whole world – and this latest series was no different – but nine races in there's 10 factory riders out with injury, Chad Reed has over a race lead in the points and what's new is old again.

But I wanna talk about the 'old' days damnit! Recently on racerxcanada.com I have been filing race reports on old supercrosses that I've watched thanks to the best thing in my life – a 10 DVD set called appropriately enough 'The World's Greatest Supercrosses'. It's allowed me to look back on a time that I remember fondly, a time when I had heroes like Ricky Johnson, Mark Barnett and Johnny O'Mara. It's also funny that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

I'm talking about the growth of supercross. In some of these races from 1985 or so the announcers are talking about how to bring supercross to the masses, about how the series is now on ESPN and that will help the sport explode. These are things we all say right now in 2008. The tracks certainly used much, much more of the stadium floor back then as well – the amount of dirt is insane! The riders were great athletes back then as well and the jumps were very inconsistent with lots of different obstacles. That's a complaint that you hear right now from the riders, that the current supercross tracks all have the same basic obstacles week-in, week-out.

But I'm not here to compare old and new SX stars, I just thought that you guys should run out and buy this DVD set and see what I'm talking about. What I am here to talk about is something that I wish I knew more about – the GPs! I grew up reading Motocross Action, Dirt Bike, Super/Motocross etc etc and read every word about every race in there. I'm not quite old enough to reminisce about the '70s (born in '73) but, man, how about those '80s!

There was always something romantic about the GPs to me and I can vividly recall reading all about Danny Chandler's sweep of the MXdN in 1982. The fact that it was such a big deal to go over there and beat the best that Europe has was not lost on me. That wasn't that long ago folks! People would be wise to realise this fact. I remember the epic battles in the 500s between David Thorpe, Eric Geboers, Georges Jobe and Andre Malherbe. Three of these great riders on what was the pinnacle of motorcycles – a works Honda CR500.

Thorpe always got such a bad rap in America because of his loss at the 1986 MXdN when Johnny O'Mara beat him on a 125. Speaking of Motocross Action, they routinely skewered a man that is a living legend. I also remember hearing something about Thorpey's rear brake going out on him but this was never mentioned.

Remember when Honda 'demoted' Geboers to the 250 class? He took it badly but went out and won the title and got his bump back to the 500s the next year. It was the class to be in back then for sure. What about the story that Hakan Carlqvist stopped for a beer in Namur while winning! That is incredible to me – I love to hear these kinds of things. Hakan was quite a character from

what I have learned in talking to a few old timers, he once ghost rode his bike into a van when it was not performing! He tried to bury his Yamaha in testing one year, literally bury it with a shovel! And how about when Jobe dropped down to the 125s in an effort to be the first man to win the title in all three classes? He really didn't have too good of a year and Geboers actually beat him to that feat with his 250 title.

I also remember when Davy Strijbos and Jon Van Der Berk went head to head for the 250 title one year. If I remember it right they collided on the last lap and one of them accused the other of turning off his gas! At least I think that's how it happened. I also used to love seeing all the different gear and sponsors that the riders had – cigarettes, ice cream, watches just to name a few.

How about Jacky Vimond finally winning the 250 title and then never getting

a chance to ride with the #1 plate after a fall at a ceremony honouring him? Man, he always looked sweet in that JT gear! Come to think of it, all the JT riders looked good. I can also picture the ads that were in the American magazines where the Euro riders were as prominently featured as any American!

Jobe was in the JT ads and Malherbe was in the AXO boot ads all the time. And speaking of Andre, the great American announcer Larry Huffman once told me that Andre was the only rider in all of his races that he announced that refused to talk to him. He always seemed to be rather arrogant in his interviews but, then again, I was reading the American slant on it.

Also the great names that riders had. Jean-Jacques Bruno, Pekka Vehkonen, Mika Kouki just to name a few. It just seemed to be another world to me a kid in Canada who would never get to see these riders. As far as English racers, I heard that Graham 'Rolls' Noyce was a hard-charger, on and off the track! An English friend of mine tells me that Lawrence Spence was a schoolboy phenom and coulda/woulda been something but got burned out early. And what held Dave Watson and Rob Andrews back from achieving world title status? They were always guys that would have a good race here and there but just couldn't reach the top.

I read every motocross magazine when I was a kid and am a big fan of the sport. I always thought the GPs sounded so mysterious and exotic, I just was excited to hear about them – unlike most Americans I think. When I went to the 2003 MXdN with Ferry we did some pre-race testing at Lommel

which was one of the coolest things ever. I couldn't believe how freaking soft and deep that sand was!

When I was a mechanic in the USA I always thought that I would like to do the GPs for a year – imagine all the cool things that a person would see! I got my chance in 1998 when a former racer named Billy Liles got me a job working in Germany for a KTM team. I couldn't wait to go to all these faraway places and was drooling at the thought of seeing these great racers that I only read about. Unfortunately my dream went up in flames and I didn't even make it to the first one but maybe one day Sean will fly me over and I can hang out at some GPs. So I'll take a window seat Sean... 



Graham Noyce – party lifestyle, sensible underpants



LOOSEN UP!

ALMOST EVERYONE FROM THE FASTEST WORLD CHAMP TO THE SLOWEST OF WEEKEND WOBBLERS WILL SUFFER FROM THE DREADED ARM PUMP AT SOME STAGE OR ANOTHER BUT HELP IS AT HAND...

Words by Alan Milway

It's hard to think of a 'training' subject that provokes more debate and divides opinion quite so widely as arm pump. If you don't suffer from it you may see it as an excuse for a bad result but for anyone reading this who knows the feeling – and, believe me, I know it well – it's much more debilitating than a mere 'excuse'. Arm pump is nothing short of a pain in the, er, arms.

It seems to be totally indiscriminate – anyone from a raw novice to a world class pro can suffer – and is hugely frustrating. No matter how fresh and fit you feel, five minutes on even the most perfectly graded track can leave you with arms so solid you can barely potter around!

There are many explanations given for arm pump and, unfortunately, many are given by those who simply don't understand what is happening within the muscles. This leads to all sorts of random explanations and so-called cures – I've heard a wide range of 'remedies' and have been frustrated on countless occasions by riders who swear to me that if they touch a barbell it gives them arm pump so they steer clear of a sufficient training schedule.

So what is it? Arm pump is essentially muscle fatigue of the forearms/hands. Holding the bars and regularly pulling the clutch and brake levers exercises the muscles of the hand and forearm. As the duration of the exercise increases, the

muscles struggle to maintain this repeated contraction and grip. It boils down to a reduction in ATP synthesis (in layman's terms ATP is the 'energy currency' of cells) within the muscle and due to this the muscle force produced is reduced and the relaxing of the muscle is slowed. Try clenching and opening your hand after pulling off the track – it all happens very slowly!

Gripping the handlebars is predominantly an isometric contraction. An isometric contraction involves tension in the muscle but no appreciable change in length (think about gripping a ball tightly – you know you are tensing the muscle but the ball isn't being crushed and your hand is not moving). Maintaining this grip over time accelerates fatigue in the muscles and causes changes within the muscle that impair its function. Potassium levels increase (the source of the burning pain), lactic acid is produced and inorganic phosphate impairs the release of calcium which is the fundamental cause of lack of contraction strength. Add this to a reduction in motor neurone firing rate (the nerves which stimulate the muscle) and your vice-like grip on the bars has been replaced by a useless claw!

Another factor to add to this equation is the action of pulling the clutch and front brake. The main muscles used to flex the fingers also flex the wrist. So with the action of gripping a bar

and repeatedly pulling the levers they are working overtime and will fatigue rapidly – a small muscle working very hard is bound to be a source of weakness.

For the majority of us, what I've just described is the underlying reason for on-track suffering. However, there are a couple of other factors that can play their part and in some cases cause severe arm pump.

Carpal tunnel syndrome is one of these conditions and is the inflammation and irritation of the nerve that stimulates the muscles of the thumb and forefingers. It is a possible explanation for arm pump and many motocross riders have undergone surgery to relieve pressure on the median nerve. This passes through a tight 'tunnel' and if this tunnel rubs the nerve it causes pain and affects the nerve transmission. However, its symptoms are slightly different to common arm pump – numbness and tingling in the fingers – and it is not the primary cause of arm pump.

Another possible cause for the pain felt could be down to Compartment Syndrome. This is the result of an increase in pressure within the forearm muscles as blood flow to the muscle is greater than flow from it – the muscle swells and if the sheath surrounding the muscle does not expand sufficiently the muscle becomes very painful. Think about your stomach expanding but



wearing a tight belt – it would be very painful. There are procedures to relieve this pressure and pain by surgically cutting the muscle fascia that surrounds the muscle allowing it to expand sufficiently.

However, there are ways in which you can help limit the effect of arm pump – or at least postpone it – without resorting to surgery! The first is by training the muscles affected. Obvious it may seem but I have seen advice to the contrary as training the forearms might somehow ‘block’ nerve impulses and sensation to the hand. The aim is not to necessarily have forearms like Popeye but to increase their fatigue resistance.

Gripping/squeezing squash balls, spring-loaded hand squeezers and also rolling a weight up a length of cord attached to a broom handle will help develop the forearm, wrist and hand flexor muscles in an appropriate manner. You should be looking for relatively high reps in each set until you can't do anymore. You do not need to increase your absolute strength, this is about building aerobic/anaerobic capability and fatigue resistance. This training will increase the blood supply to the muscle and make the muscle more efficient in producing force. This training will also help you cope more effectively with the unpleasant burning sensation caused by the build-up of lactate and potassium in the muscle.

If you were to lift heavy weights for low repetitions (say four to six per set) you would increase the size and strength of the muscle. However, you would not increase the blood supply or its fatigue resistance. A bigger muscle with proportionally less blood flow (as there is more muscle with the same blood supply) will cause a muscle to tire even more quickly – hence the fear of lifting weights.

As I have explained, while gripping the bars you are exerting a tension. Having a strong, vice-like grip will produce a large contraction and this will promote arm pump. Try to minimise your grip strength and relax. This relaxing is important and the reason why people say arm pump is ‘all in the head’. This is because a common response to a stressful situation – such as being hounded on the track – is to tense up. As you tense up your grip tenses and you are working your muscles harder so arm pump comes on more quickly. On the flip side, if you are out having fun, flowing around a track and riding well, you will be exerting a relatively weak grip which means the forearms are not working too hard. Practice consciously relaxing slightly on the grips, especially if you are in the air. This relaxation will allow blood flow to the muscles to ‘wash away’ those metabolites and supply oxygen and fuel to the muscle.

Look at your clutch lever and front brake. Is

your clutch stiff and needs a lot of force to pull? Changing and lubricating your clutch cable will make it feel light again and reduce the amount of force required to pull it. Hydraulic clutches are a great benefit in this respect. Also look at the reach and adjust this so that you’re not stretching as if you are you are only using the tips of your fingers to pull the lever this is not efficient. And get your suspension set up!

Experiments have shown that when fatigued the action potential (electrical stimulation of the muscle) is not itself affected or diminished but the metabolite balance within the muscle is such to cause a rapid fall in the ability to develop or maintain force and is the source of the ‘burning’ sensation felt. Training your forearm muscles for fatigue resistance and trying to modify your grip on the bars and refrain from a ‘death grip’ will go a long way towards helping.

In day-to-day jobs and also many forms of cardio exercise, the muscles of the forearms are not trained. This lack of training means that the muscles are not ready for a sudden, hard workout come the weekend and will probably be your weak link. Simple exercises such as rolling a weight up and down a rope or wrist curls a few times a week will help to train the muscles.

If you’re relaxed on the track, can get some regular bike time in and are out to enjoy the ride, hopefully your arms won’t get in the way...



DUTCH OVEN!

MARC DE REUVER CRANKS UP THE HEAT AT HAWKSTONE TO ROAST THE MX1 FIELD AS TYLA RATTRAY HANGS TOUGH DOWN IN MX2

Words by JP O'Connell Photos by still-mx.co.uk

With the BBC's five-day weather forecast predicting heavy rain, high winds, plagues of locusts and a nationwide outbreak of boils, it's either time to start work on that ark you've always meant to knock up or, alternatively, you may want to plot a course for Shrewsbury for the 10th Hawkstone Park International MX.

Luckily, Aunty Beeb gets it wrong this time and Hawkstone Park's bathed in beautiful sunshine for most of the day's fantastic racing. All well and good for MX fans but no consolation for anyone who's spent all weekend in their shed with a tenon saw and a spirit level.

Most of the GP top guns are in attendance

Marc De Reuver (#15) and Bas Verhoeven (#78) go bar-to-bar into the opening turn



including '07 world MX1 champ Steve Ramon and woulda, shoulda, gonna be champ Josh Coppins. It's also a chance to see some of the riders on their new mounts with Billy Mac on his Honda, David Philippaerts on a Yamaha, Ken De Dycker on a Suzuki and Marc De Reuver on a Honda.

The MX2 class is also fully loaded with Tommy Searle, Tyla Rattray, Stephen Sword, Gareth Swanepoel, Mike Brown and Carl Nunn among a host of small-bore talent. Eagle-eyed fans also get a chance to do some star-gazing away from the track with former world champs including Eric Geboers, Dave Thorpe and Stefan Everts mingling with spectators.

The track is in excellent condition and the Brits dominate the top 10 in MX2 qualifying with Shaun Simpson of Team KTM UK posting the quickest time and Searle, Rattray, Swordy, Nunny and Banks-Browne just behind him.

As the gate drops on the opening MX2 race it's Tommy Gun who puts himself at the front with Simpson just behind him but on the second lap Searle makes a small mistake and Simpson – who's on non-factory equipment – takes advantage and moves to the front. Swordy advances from a horrible start to make up the top five behind Searle, Rattray and Jeremy Van Horebeek before Rattray has a coming together with his team-mate, sending the vice world

champion all the way back to 16th.

In the ensuing melee Erik Eggens moves ahead of Rattray before getting in front of both Van Horebeek and Sword for second. There's no catching Simpson who checks out and wins by a massive 24 seconds over Eggens and Sword.

In race two it's Simpson at the pointy end with the usual suspects from race one all in tow as they round out lap one and the KTM pilot is looking like he's going to cause a huge upset by pulling off the double. By the halfway point Simpson leads Searle, Rattray, Eggens and Sword but his luck runs out as he stalls his bike and drops all the way back to 22nd as he has a mare getting it re-started.

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RESULTS

MX1 >>

1	Marc De Reuver	(Honda)	25+30=55
2	Steve Ramon	(Suzuki)	27+25=52
3	Josh Coppins	(Yamaha)	23+27=50
4	Ken De Dycker	(Suzuki)	30+19=49
5	David Philippaerts	(Yamaha)	21+21=42
6	Lauris Freibergs	(Yamaha)	17+17=34
7	Brad Anderson	(Suzuki)	19+15=34
8	Billy MacKenzie	(Honda)	0+23=23
9	Yoshi Atsuta	(Honda)	10+13=23
10	Marvin van Daele	(Suzuki)	11+11=22

MX2 >>

1	Tyla Rattray	(KTM)	21+30=51
2	Stephen Sword	(Kawasaki)	25+25=50
3	Erik Eggens	(Suzuki)	27+23=50
4	Jeremy Van Horebeek	(KTM)	23+19=42
5	Joel Roelants	(KTM)	13+21=34
6	Tommy Searle	(KTM)	5+27=32
7	Shaun Simpson	(KTM)	30+0=30
8	Martin Barr	(Yamaha)	17+8=25
9	Xavier Boog	(Suzuki)	15+9=24
10	Carl Nunn	(Suzuki)	7+15=22

INTERNATIONAL GRAND FINAL >>

1 Searle, 2 Ramon, 3 Philippaerts, 4 MacKenzie,
5 Simpson, 6 Rattray, 7 Roelants, 8 Coppins,
9 Swanepoel, 10 Priem



Searle isn't riding at his best and after a small mistake Rattray takes advantage and grabs the lead, pulling out a huge 21 seconds over the course of about six laps to take an easy win and with it the MX2 overall. Stephen Sword keeps up his momentum going into his comeback season when he passes Eggens to give him third in the race and second overall.

After securing the win Styra's pleased with his day's work. "It was a good day, I love coming out to Hawkstone and there was some good racing today. For the last two years it's been raining and has been just mud, this is the first time I've come here in the dry and it's been really good. I really had a lot of fun out there."

"It was an intense race with Tommy and Shaun pushing in the beginning but that's something I needed and something I'm working on. Unfortunately, I crashed with Tommy in the first race – I landed on him – so that's why I only came fifth but all in all it was a good day."

With second overall Stephen Sword is looking like a big threat in the GPs this season. "I'm reasonably happy but obviously I'm not where I want to be completely. There's been some improvement and I'm getting faster and everything is coming together, I'm feeling strong. I was 10th on the first lap in each of the races, I just had to work my way up and got up to third."

"I know when I'm riding well and if you're not



starting with those guys it's difficult to catch them up. Looking ahead to the season I'm definitely happy with where I am, I just need to build a little more speed and a bit more confidence up."

The first MX1 race is all thrills and spills as the pack go down en masse at the end of the start straight, leaving Jordan Rose in a crumpled heap and Molson Kawasaki's Tom Church in virtually last place. Unscathed, Bas Verhoeven leads the first lap until Billy Mac moves past on lap two and starts pulling a small lead over Ken De Dycker.

Behind them Coppins and Ramon are having a great battle, swapping paint and places as each one desperately tries to out manoeuvre the other. De Dycker keeps pace with MacKenzie and is handed the lead on lap eight when Billy lands on a lapper and trashes his bike. While Ramon and Coppins battle it out, De Reuver catches them and passes Coppins for third which is how it stays for the rest of the race.

In race two it's again Billy Mac out front as he grabs a huge holeshot and is leading by about three seconds after a quarter-of-a-lap with Coppins in second from De Reuver and De Dycker. De Reuver puts pressure on MacKenzie towards the end of the race and with only a lap to go Billy makes a small mistake and De Reuver is through. On the last lap MacKenzie's front wheel pushes out of a rut in a turn allowing both Coppins and Ramon to pass him for second and third.

For Martin Honda's De Reuver it's an excellent day with his 3-1 card good enough for the MX1 overall. After being let go by Rinaldi Yamaha at the end of last season, today's win is

super sweet for the ever-smiling Dutchman.

"I felt good. I love to be in Hawkstone Park because I love the track, not because it's sand but because of the atmosphere. This is a real motocross track. In the first heat I was third behind Ramon but very close. In the second heat I crashed just after the finish line and Coppins passed me but I got back on and won!"

After the day's battle it's Ramon who tops Coppins by two points and the Suzuki rider's pretty pleased to put one over the man seen by many as favourite to lift the '08 world MX1 title.

"At the beginning of the day I had a lot of problems with arm pump and in the first moto I had to slow down but the second race was better for me. We did some testing and made some changes to the bike today which was all in the right direction. The riding was going good and physically I felt good. I'm looking forward to the season."

After all the fun of the fair there's still more as the top 16 from the MX2 final and top 20 from the MX1 final – plus four promoters' choice – compete in the International Grand Final. Just to keep things interesting the gate's split and the MX2 boys get a head start over the bigger bikes. But no matter how they started the tale of the tape will always be that Searle led from start to finish, putting in an awesome performance.

"I had two bad races," admits Tommy, "and Jamie [Dobb] was telling me that I wasn't riding how I should and I knew that I wasn't riding how I should or how I can so I just wanted to go and show them what I've got. So I went out and put it down and I'm happy to come away with one good race – I enjoyed that last one and I'm looking forward to the start of the season."

Shaun Simpson wins the opening MX2 race and is leading the second until he stalls

**Carl Nunn grabs fourth in
the Pro Open Main Event**



LONDON CALLING!

THE BRITISH SX CHAMPIONSHIP COMES TO A BAR-BASHING,
PLASTICS-SCRAPING CLIMAX AT THE O2 ARENA WHERE
MIKE BROWN AND COLTON FACCIOCCI SHARE THE SPOILS...

Words by JP O'Connell Photos by still-mx.co.uk

For their season finale Future West sweep up all the dirt from the Liverpool Echo Arena, dump it onto the floor of the amazing O2 Arena in London and get Dirt Wurx to work their magic. The arena itself seats 23,000 but the floor space itself isn't huge and I think it's fair to say that the track's more arenacross than supercross. But who's complaining? Dirt Wurx do an excellent job of making a tight, technical circuit which includes 180 degree switchbacks, two sets of whoops, a big triple and a rhythm section.

The fans are in for a treat as both the Pro Lites and Pro Open titles are up for grabs, although Mike Brown already has one hand on the Open trophy. Due to the size of the circuit everybody in the Open class are riding 250Fs with the sole exception of Gordon Crockard. Never one to make life easy on himself, GC's also booked in for the first round of the British Enduro Championship the following day! All of the main players manage to get through their heats with the exception of Gordy ("some knobber T-boned me in the heat") who takes a trip to the LCQ but the Irishman gets his head down and wins it.

After the heats it's time for the head-to-head which is immensely popular with the crowd, especially with a couple of take downs thrown in. The format's slightly changed from Liverpool in that it's two laps instead of one and it's Mike Brown who goes home with the fattest wallet after beating Crockard, Greedy and then Neville Bradshaw in the final. >>



Welsh flier Ashley Greedy just misses out on overall podiums in both Pro classes

02sx

South African Neville
Bradshaw leads Canadian
Jean Sebastien Roy



The Lites title goes to Colton Facciotti by the narrowest of margins from his compatriot JSR

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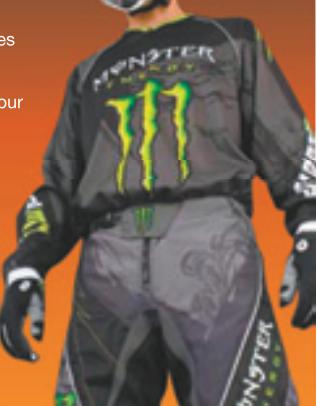
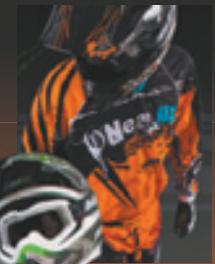
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In the Pro Open class heading into London it's Brownie who holds a healthy 13-point lead over the only man with a mathematical chance of beating him, multi Canadian national champ Jean Sebastian Roy. In the Pro Lites class things are a little closer with Canada's Colton Facciotti topping the table by three points over JSR but with the top six riders all in with a shot at the title.

And Brown decides to shake things up a little and enters the Lites as well as the Open and when the gate drops on the Lites Main Event it's holeshot king Brownie who leads into the first turn. Jean Sebastian Roy does just about all that's asked of him by sticking it into second place and not giving it up. Unfortunately for JSR, Facciotti does just about all that's asked of him as well and brings it home in third to take the Lites SX title by a single point. Had Brown not ridden the lites then Roy and Facciotti would have been tied on points and race wins...but then if my aunt had a couple of hairy boys she'd be my uncle!

Neville Bradshaw keeps it steady and brings it home in fourth – had Breville ridden in the first round he would have been a huge threat for the championship (but then if my uncle had a hairy fairy he'd be my aunt – SL).

Despite clinching the title, Facciotti admits to letting the pressure get to him. "It didn't really go as planned. I was a little nervous off the start and had to work my way back up through the pack but I just focussed on having fun out there. And if I had to lose the title to anyone then I would have preferred it to go to JSR as he's my team-mate.

"I could see him in front of me but there were so many lappers it was hard to tell which position I was in, I just hoped that I was right there behind him. The Dirt Wurx crew have done an awesome job putting things together with the space that they have – it made for some good racing out there."

After a short break the riders line up for the Pro Open and once again it's Brown with the hair trigger as he slides it into the first turn and notches yet another holeshot on his six shooter. He's followed by AMA West Coast Lites rider Kyle Beaton and Carl Nunn who also gets a great start. By lap three Brownie has opened up about a 20-metre gap on Beaton with Nunn being passed by Facciotti for third with Brownie's only threat for the crown – JSR – back in fifth.

It's looking like a bit of a procession until the lappers come into play about two thirds of the way through. Brown gets stuck behind a slower rider who doggedly sticks to the racing line and it takes him two laps to get past. This allows Beaton to close the gap and make a good clean pass on Brown which he holds to the flag. Facciotti takes third spot on the podium with Nunn fourth and JSR fifth.

So Brown claims the crown but the man from Tennessee hates losing. "You always want to win – you know he [Beaton] rode good but the back markers, I mean I had a good lead and them guys they just wouldn't move out of your way. I spent two laps following someone I just couldn't get around, they were just riding the race line. But, hey, that's racing. You know he got a good track and he rode a good race, he deserved to win."

Beaton's happy to end the series on the top of the box. "I got off to a half-decent start, settled into second, put my head down and just tried to catch up to Mike. I started pressuring him and he started making some mistakes and I was able to get around him clean, then I just put my head down and rode smooth from then on out.

"The track was really tight – it was probably the tightest track I've ridden on over here – but it was good and pretty technical, you really had to be careful choosing your lines. It felt good to get up here, I guess he's been winning everything over here and it felt good to beat him."



JSR's hopes of the Open title evaporate with a fifth in the final Main Event



AMA SX rider Kyle Beaton makes the most of back markers to snatch the Open win from Brownie



He's beaten by Beaton but it's the crown for Mike Brown

SERIES STANDINGS

PRO OPEN >>

1	Mike Brown	94 points
2	Jean Sebastian Roy	75
3	Colton Facciotti	58
4	Ashley Greedy	53
5	Neville Bradshaw	48
6	Gordon Crockard	48

PRO LITES >>

1	Colton Facciotti	81 points
2	Jean Sebastian Roy	80
3	Neville Bradshaw	62
4	Ashley Greedy	55
5	Kris Foster	54
6	Per Kristian Bakke	46

CLUBMEN OPEN >>

1	Mark Atkinson	76 points
2	Carl Jones	72
3	Danny Blakely	70
4	Alex Hornsby	66
5	Peter Eccles	46
6	Paul Seamer	38

CLUBMEN LITES >>

1	Carl Jones	90 points
2	Harry Bertram	58
3	Vincent Crossard	50
4	Mike Dawson	44
5	Ryan Barratt	38
6	Tom Bennett	38

WIN! WIN! WIN!

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Reed back on track but Canard takes wild Lites after clashing with Villopoto - See page 6



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- Full story page 8

COLMORE CUP

Thorpe takes premier but Danby bags Novogar points

- See page 29



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BEC ROUND 1

CHAMPIONSHIP CLASS

1 Tom Sagar (KTM)	855.76
2 Si Wakely (Husqvarna)	858.55
3 Greg Evans (KTM)	868.19
4 Euan McConnell (TM)	870.86
5 Daryl Bolter (Husqvarna)	882.96
6 Gordon Crockard (Gas Gas)	884.81
7 Ollie Moyce (Yamaha)	885.45
8 Ashley Wood (Honda)	886.86
9 Darren Carter (KTM)	887.23
10 Dylan Jones (Yamaha)	888.35

BEC wrap

Defending champ Tom Sagar is in the perfect position to snatch victory when Daryl Bolter falls on the final test



CLOSE CALL!

NOW A FULL-TIME MEMBER OF THE KTM ENDURO FACTORY TEAM, TOM SAGAR STARTS THE DEFENCE OF HIS BRITISH ENDURO CHAMPIONSHIP TITLE WITH A WIN AT ROUND ONE – BUT ONLY JUST

Words and photo by JONTY EDMUNDSEN

"It doesn't get much closer than that," comments BEC opening round organiser Andy Waters as defending British champion Tom Sagar wins the last special test of the Muntjac Enduro and in doing so tops the sandy season opener.

Sagar trails MPS Racing Husqvarna rider Daryl Bolter for much of the day until the decisive final test sees it all go a little Pete Tong for Daryl as a near three-second advantage goes down the drain when he topples off and stalls his 250F.

Winner of tests one and two, Bolter's mistake costs the European Enduro Champion dearly as he eventually places fifth and misses out on what would have been his first ever outright BEC win. "I'm so pissed off," comments the Husky rider. "I lost the front wheel, fell and my bike stalled just as I got to it. I couldn't get it started for what seemed like ages. The win was mine for the taking."

With Daryl's day having gone from good to bad, Sagar's day goes from pretty good to cock-on! Second and less than one-second behind Bolter on the first test, on test two Sagar again finishes as runner-up before making the most of his rival's mistake to win test three.

"I'd settled for second really because Daryl was riding so well," admits the defending champ. "I rode the first two tests within myself, not making any mistakes. Things came good for me on the last test. It's not great winning like this but that's the way it goes sometimes. I'm still adjusting to the 250 four-stroke so I'm really pleased with the way things have gone."

With Tom winning, Daryl dropping to fifth and expected front runner Paul Edmondson crashing out, the runner-up spot goes Si Wakely with Greg Evans third. With Wakely finishing less than three seconds adrift of Sagar he shows that his decision to switch to a 450 was a good one.

"Things went really well," explains Si. "The 450 was great. I really felt I was riding well and I'm pleased with my speed. Although the test didn't really suit a bigger bike in places to be so close to Tom is great. It should be a good season."

Third, having seen his efforts in '07 rewarded with a KTM UK-backed ride for '08, Greg Evans rises to the occasion and shows that his hard work during the winter has paid off. "I put in three consistent tests and didn't really make any mistakes," comments Greg. "If I keep working hard I think I can get closer to Tom and Si."

Fourth and topping the Enduro 3 class aboard TM's mighty 530cc woods weapon is Euan McConnell. Opting to step onto a four-stroke rather than campaign a 300cc two-stroke like he did in '07, McConnell puts in solid test times on runs one and two but loses precious time on the third and final run which prevents him finishing higher than fourth.

With Bolter next up on the result in fifth, sixth goes to Irishman Gordon Crockard. Using the event as last-minute training ahead of the start of the US GNCC series, GC has a not-so-good opening test, a good second test and a not-so-good final test but all things considered performs well on his borrowed Gas Gas machinery.

"It was tough but I enjoyed it," grins the former MX GP racer. "The special tests took a bit of getting used to. I was really looking forward to the last test of the day but I hit a tree stump and flattened my pipe which messed things up a bit."

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TEENAGER RAMPAGE!

HOT TIPS FOR THE 2008 SEASON

Words and photos by Mike Gurney

With youth nationals bursting out left, right and centre and coming up faster than spring daffodils now's a good time to get the crystal ball out and have a look at the runners and riders across all the various competitions to see who looks like a tasty bet for '08 silverware.

In the Junior 65cc sections one name seems to stand out above the rest as a clear favourite. Ben Green, in his third year of national exploits, should have enough firepower to get them dancing in the streets of Penrith come the autumn.

I'm sure he won't have it all his own way though and I expect a battle royal from the likes of Casey Connelly, Danny Lanfear, Robert Yates, Todd Kellett, Gregg Hyett, Ryan Snaith, Tyrone Cleaver and the rest. At the end of the day it could be a repeat of last year with one clear front runner hassled and harried all the way by a super-competitive pack of chasers.

Ben Howell along with James Dunn both have age and experience on their side and start as favourites in the SW85cc divisions. But that super-charged group of Junior 65cc upgraders from last season in the shape of Messrs Watson, Cooper, Heath, Callaghan Southwood, Eccles and Neal to name just a few will all be snapping at their heels along with some of the

second year guys like Liam Garland, Connor Clarke and Curtis Blamey together with Ricky Roderick who has shown some terrific winter form.

Perhaps the strongest favourite of all anywhere this year comes in the shape of 14-year-old Luke Hawkins. In his third year with PAR Homes Honda and his second season in the BW85cc class, it should be a year that sees Luke right at the very top again with another number one plate. If there is to be a challenge to his supremacy only Dan Hutchinson has enough firepower to trouble Luke.

The real battle looks like being for the lower places and I expect Bryn Clarke and Ryan Houghton with last year's experience in this section to be really strong contenders along with 2007 small wheel champs Scotland's Matthew Fleming and Manx flier Jamie McCanney. Then it's a big shout for Robbie Muscat, Scott Alldridge and Dan Thornhill to be scrapping it out to get on the podium steps.

Saving the very best until last, this year's BYMX Open, Elite Open, MXY2 and KWS Masters 125cc championships could provide the hottest youth racing we've seen in recent years. The section is absolutely overloaded with superb, evenly-matched talent with no obvious favourite, just endless possibilities.

Take a look at field... Lewis King's having a final tilt at the BYMX youth crown and looking in form on the 144 Electraction TM. Then there's 15-year-old Scott James fully toolled up with both two and four-stroke Team Green machinery. Josh Waterman's looking fitter, leaner, meaner and hungry for success and Scott Elderfield's another member of the super-quick 15 club and seemingly back to his brilliant best.

How about KTM pilot David Games with all the benefit of the ACU winter academy training who will undoubtedly be tough to beat? And so will two real kingpins from last year in Lewis Tombs and my Open class rider of the year for '07, Mel Pocock on the U Tag Yamaha. Better not forget our friends in the north Joe Gregory, Nathan Rooks and Danger UK's Honda-mounted Gavin Foulson, along with the ultimate cross-border raider Tommy Fenwick.

There's more of last year's experienced brigade in the shape of Will Worden, Edward Allingham and Tom Watts and just to add even more spice a gaggle of last year's young upstarts from the big wheels in the form of Sam Davis, Josh Spinks, Connor Walkley and James Hutchinson. And as if that's not enough there's even more 15-year-old talent in the guise of Lewis Trickett and Jack Rowland.

Pick a winner? You must be joking!

BACK FOR MORE!

RAGE CATCHES UP WITH A TEENAGE TALENT WHO WAS READY TO HANG UP HIS BOOTS – UNTIL HE REALISED WHAT HE WAS MISSING...

Words and photo by Mike Gurney

I had been racing since I was six years old and it felt like I was missing out because I wasn't able to spend my weekends hanging out with my school mates. After a couple of months away from the sport though I realised that motocross is a huge part of my life and I missed it more than I thought I would."

That's quite a thought-provoking statement from Scott Alldridge and a little window into the world of one of the country's best racers in his age group. The 13-year-old had decided at the end of last season after six years of hard slog and total commitment that a break from the sport was in order. But at the end of the day a change of heart and mind from Scott is good news and means he will be back in national action for '08.

KTM runner Scott together with Robbie Muscat, Dan Thornhill and Ryan Houghton represent a group of riders who are the very best of the 1995 vintage so watch out for the bun fight all season long to see who ends up with the bragging rights. For this season Scott has focused mainly on the BYMX series with the possibility of doing some other selected nationals. So what's a satisfying game plan for '08?

"Anything within the top 10 at the nationals will be a good result," reckons Scott but, as

always, he'll be giving it the full 100 per cent and have his eyes focused on the top six even though it's his rookie year in the big wheels. And it's bound to be a real tough one – especially as Scott starts the season with a frustrating six weeks out and may even miss the opening BYMX round as a result of a recently broken tibia.

Scott's main sponsors were more than happy to climb back on board for this season and it's big thanks from the talented teenager to Fox Europe for all the shiny new gear, SEP Engineering for piston and crank work, 360 Technologies, Hardcore Racing, PF Engineering and Motocross World for sorting out the suspension on a machine that is a mix of old and new parts for budgetary reasons.

High on the wish list for '08 like a lot of other competitors would be a full machinery sponsorship or a comprehensive spares budget to make the going a bit easier on parents Chris and Julie. Finance is a big consideration in youth MX at the top level and it would be criminal if any of the real talent is frozen out because of spiralling costs, a serious issue affecting more than one top runner at the moment.

So come on you manufacturers – we all know you have a bob or two stashed way so dig deep for the kids and the future of the sport!



MXCV

DoB: 10/02/95

HOMETOWN: Nottingham

FAVOURITE TRACK: Matchams Park

FIRST RACE: Polesworth 2002

NATIONAL RECORD:

2005

Junior 65cc KWS – fourth overall

Junior 65cc BYMX – fifth overall

2007

SW85cc ELITE – second overall

SW85cc BYMX – third overall

CAPITAL CLOSURE!

FUTURE WEST BRITISH SX SERIES SIGNS OFF IN THE BIG SMOKE

Photos by still-mx.co.uk

The four-round Future West British SX Championship comes to a thrilling close at London's awesome O2 Arena at the end of February.

With five youth titles up for grabs – and nothing decided going into the final event of the ACU-sanctioned series – tensions are running high on the night.

The Auto class is super-tight going into London with Tommy Schofield holding a slender two-point lead from Jamie Clark and young Alfie Mountfort a further five points off the pace. And on the night it's Tommy – whose record this series has been a pretty impressive 3-3-1-1 – who crosses the line first to wrap up the title.

Sheffield winner Jamie is left counting the cost of a disappointing opening night in Liverpool as his fighting second in London means he ends the championship five points adrift with a final 1-5-2-2 card. Third overall goes to Alfie Mountfort.

It's even closer in the 65cc class where super-consistent Tom Neal is just a point ahead of Alfie Bowtell before the gate drops on the Main Event. Tom's not won a race all series but two seconds and a third before reaching the O2 have left him in pole and second in the capital is good enough for the title from Scooter Webster whose wins at the final two rounds lift him above second round winner Alfie in the championship standings.

Daniel Clark holds a one-point lead from Team Relentless Youth Academy rider James Dunn in the SW85cc class after three rounds but third on the night isn't good enough for the title for Daniel as James leads home Ben Watson who makes his series debut in London.

With a five-point advantage over Luke Norris leaving Liverpool, Ross Clarke's firmly in the driving seat in the BW85s. And his second win of the championship campaign seals the title in the best possible way as Luke follows Jamie Raynor home in third.

Terrifically talented Scott Elderfield is the stand-out star of the youth 125cc division in London but as it's his only appearance of the series he's no threat for championship honours. Instead the battle's between Norwegian series leader Per Kristian Bakke and Sheffield winner Lewis King.

A double win at Liverpool for the Scandinavian – combined with a disastrous seventh on night two at the Echo Arena for Lewis – means the title always looks likely to be heading to the land of fjords. Lewis turns up the heat in London to take second behind Scott but a solid third is good enough for the biking Viking to clinch the crown.



Scott Elderfield is in command in the O2 Arena



FINAL SERIES STANDINGS

AUTOS

- 1 Tommy Schofield 90 points, 2 Jamie Clark 85,
- 3 Alfie Mountfort 72, 4 Tom Hume 58,
- 5 Harry Wichman 57, 6 Elliot Philips 55

65cc

- 1 Tom Neal 86 points, 2 Scooter Webster 83,
- 3 Alfie Bowtell 72, 4 George Turner 64,
- 5 Gradie Featherstone 60, 6 Joe Jefferies 54

SW85cc

- 1 James Dunn 90 points, 2 Daniel Clark 86,
- 3 Brady Ward 64, 4 Harry Bradley 62,
- 5 Michael Eccles 56, 6 Sam Winterburn 50

BW85cc

- 1 Ross Clarke 88, 2 Luke Norris 78,
- 3 Ben Reed 72, 4 Dex Wharton 62,
- 5 Jamie Rayner 44, 6 Josh Hart 32

YOUTH 125cc

- 1 Per Kristian Bakke 90, 2 Lewis King 83,
- 3 Ryan Potenger 59, 4 Rowan Hill 53,
- 5 Tom Bennett 45, 6 Sean Winter 33

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COMEBACKKID!

INJURIES MAY HAVE KEPT HIM OFF THE TOP OF THE BOX FOR A FEW SEASONS BUT 2008 COULD BE LUKE HAWKINS' BEST YEAR YET...

Words and photo by Mike Gurney

Ben Watson has had tons of acclaim heaped on him – and quite rightly too – for winning the BYMX Junior 65cc title at just 10 years old. But he's not the youngest winner of the class...

Rewind back a few years to 2003 and a certain Luke Hawkins took the crown quite incredibly aged just nine! As defending champion in 2004 I caught my first glimpse of Luke at that season's BYMX opener at Polesworth where he absolutely blew my socks off with his performance aboard the JMX 65cc KTM. Half-a-lap in front of the opposition, in cruise mode and styling for the camera!

For all of that 2004 season Luke was in awesome form as he battled it out with current Stateside ex-pats Max Anstie and Jack Rowe along with the rest of the tiddler class. My other abiding memory of Luke from that season was his performance at the Hawkstone round of the KWS. Looping the bike on the startline to give the whole field a huge head start, by the final lap Luke had not only nailed all but one in a scorching display but was right in the shadow of the leader Jack Rowe as the chequers fell!

By mid-season Luke had a commanding lead in the BYMX series and was heading the KWS rankings. He also went to Belgium and won the world mini crown along with a brand new bike – Luke was literally on top of the world.

Then it all came crashing down just a week later with a shattered femur while out practising. The long road back to full fitness was a tough one through 2005. Into 2006 and by now under the PAR banner, Luke claimed the runner-up position in the KWS SW85s but injury again disrupted the BYMX season.

Last year – still with PAR – saw a significant change with Luke opting for the new 150F Honda in a super-competitive BW85cc class. Luke proved he could hold his own and more against the older guys by taking cracking national race wins at Matchams, Leuchars and Landrake among others. At the mid-season point Luke was in the runner-up berth in both KWS and BSMA when the old injury jinx struck again with a knee crunch at Wakes Colne.

Back on the crutches and out for six weeks, true to form Luke returned with a bang by putting in his best performance of the year with



Back in the day action from '04

two race wins that could have been three if it had not been for an electrical failure at the final round of the KWS at Foxhill.

After a month in Florida over Christmas the story comes full circle as I was at Polesworth again recently listening to a conversation as someone else was enthusing about Luke blowing them away at Dunkirk the week before. "Looking awesome, just like a top pro," they said but added, "oh but he's done his collar bone!"

Just a minor blip hopefully and I expect Luke to be fully fit, stoked up, raring to go and knocking my socks off in a season where he should strike gold again and put his career firmly back on track.

PENNYPOWER!

JAKE'S 150 IS HOPPED TO TROT...

Words and photo by Geoff Walker

The Honda CRF150 has become something of a hop-up dream and there are some trick 150s popping up at club and national level races.

Everyone has their own idea of how to put the 'ultimate' package together to hit the race track and the CRF hitting this page has been put together by Stewart Penny for his 13-year-old son Jake.

The blend of parts placed upon and around the little Honda's shell is impressive and the Pennys have put a good package together. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating and we will keep an eye on this little Will Power Racing-tuned machine through the year to see if it's ripping holeshots around the UK.

Some of the parts included in the build are UFO plastics, Pro Carbon guards, Talon Wheels, Renthal bars, Danger UK graphics, Leo Vince X3 titanium exhaust, Michelin tyres and heavy



duty tubes, Castrol oils and, of course, the Will Power-tuned motor. Some of the mods to the motor include a flowed head, re-worked valve seat angles, valves, cam, high-compression piston and manual cam chain tensioner.

Good luck Team Penny for the '08 season.

GA week after our technical editor checked out Team Penny's steed the Curse of Wakker kicked in and Jake hit the eject button during a practice session, badly breaking his wrist when he returned to terra firma. So get well soon Jake!

MAX ANSTIE!

IT'S RAINING IN CALI BUT MAX USES THE MUD TO HIS ADVANTAGE WITH A WINNING DEBUT ON HIS ORANGE 125cc ROCKET

Here we are in sunny Cali – not! It's funny because I phoned my mum in the morning and she said that the weather was the best it has been in ages at home. The rain started over here the night of the last SX in Anaheim and carried through the next day until my final moto!

In the 85cc races I got off to a good start in both motos and was out in front. One thing that the Americans are not used to is riding in the rain – in Europe we get around 300 days of rain but in the USA they get just 65! So we are always riding in the rain but over here when it rains everybody goes home. I had a little advantage with living in Europe all my life so with some good mud riding I managed to pull off a pair of wins.

I wasn't planning on doing a race on my 125cc yet but the unexpected departure of my adoptive big brother Jordan who had to go back to England for a week meant there was a space on the gate. I had never done a start on a 125cc and riding against all the big guys meant I was a bit nervous but I used my superior power-to-weight ratio to once again get off to the early lead.

In the second race I used my experience from the first race to again get out in front. I was quite surprised with myself because I was riding in the mud on a big bike and doing well. I managed to keep it together until the finish to take the win in my first 125cc races!

My start wasn't so good in moto one of the Superminis but I soon found myself out in front. I had done three of five laps when I got a flat rear! I managed to hold the lead for the next lap until I finally slipped back to second. In the second moto I got out to the early lead and kept it that way.

The next week we rode four days straight at fellow Englishman Adam Chatfield's SX compound. It was great to be able to put myself in with the pros and see how I was going on my 125cc and 85cc machines. And in all honesty by the end of the four days I was tapping onto the back of some of them!

After some fun SX training and three months in the USA we were on the plane heading for Heathrow. Once back we spent a week at home in Newbury where we ran some MX schools at our track and did some supercross training with some of the other best amateurs in Britain getting ready for the London SX. It also gave me time to go and speak to all my teachers to keep up to date with what has been going on at school.

Back in 2001 when Jordan Booker, me and many of the current top 14 and 15-year-olds used to battle it out in the 50cc British championships, I had my lightning machine that went by the name of Sparky! And it was time to drag my trusty Husqvarna back out but this time it was for my lil bro Taylor! We were getting him trained up because at the age of four we have entered him in his first race – the World Mini Grand Prix – which will take place in Las Vegas in April. He's already been placed in the factory KTM junior team and will be racing at Anaheim the same time as me but in the KJSC KTM 50cc Challenge!

It was a great week and definitely worth the air miles but after all the fun we had to say our goodbyes. Can't wait to see Taylor again in April. So we were on our way back to the US – Jordan had come out with us and this time my mum came out as well to help around the house. Ha ha.

We now have two weeks until we're off on our travels again, this time to Texas for the first round of the Amateur Nationals in Lake Whitney.

Okay, back to work...

Max

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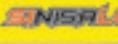
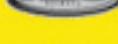


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BLACK KNIGHT!

BILLY UNVEILS THE NEW MONSTER CAS HONDA COLOUR SCHEME AT HAWKSTONE – AND SHOWS THE MX WORLD THAT HE MEANS BUSINESS

LAST YOU heard I was in America and I could bet most of what I wrote was happy clappy, just like the Americans. So this time I'm back in Britain and most of what I write is probably gonna be depressing and moany, just like the British! The reason is because we have nothing to be happy about over here – it's just crap! It's small, it's cold, it's windy, it's polluted – I could go on and on...

Sorry to pish on anyone's bonfire but the only thing that has been good since I've been back is Hawkstone! What an awesome day and how about the weather this time round? Ain't got a bad thing to say about Hawkstone. The track was mint, the fans were there in droves and as far as I know everyone got out the paddock in good time! It was also my very first race on the Honda and I loved every lap (except maybe the last lap in moto two)!

Coming into Hawkstone I didn't really know what to expect but then again I wasn't really worrying what I was gonna do, I just wanted to jump on my bike and have a little squirt around a scramble track! I've been so excited riding my Honda, I've been doing things in practice and stuff that I would never normally do just because I feel so confident in the bike and I guess it showed at Hawkstone. The first race I passed everyone in front of me within half-a-lap and I pulled off an awesome move into the bombhole to pass De Dycker and someone else for the lead. It was one of those things that gave me a rush and made me think 'right, this race is mine!'

It was all going well until near the end when a back-marker stalled it in front of me off a small ski jump and I landed right on top of him, snapping something on the bike. So that was the end of the first race but I felt good and was on course for a win.

The second race I pulled a monster holeshot and led until the very end. I made the mistake of starting to worry about what was behind me instead of in front of me and De Reuver came past me. With half-a-lap left I tried that little bit harder to try catch him and slid out, almost going down and letting Coppins and Ramon slip through. I was pretty pissed off about that one.

The last race was even cooler and it was actually more fun passing riders than getting a holeshot. The MX2 guys left the gate and I thought I had 10 seconds before our gates dropped but it turns out it was only five so I was still sitting there spinning my

tyre when the gate dropped! But it made it fun coming through and I was pulling off some mega passes and just having so much fun! My fitness felt incredible considering we didn't have long between getting changed from race two.

I remember passing Philippaerts, Ramon and Swanny in one lap. I didn't even realise where I was until my new mechanic Teasy (Paul Teasdale) told me I was second and 10 seconds behind Tommy. I had a look over the track and saw Tommy in the lead and I did not want to let an MX2 bike win so I put in a hard lap and caught him by six seconds. I could see him on the same straight as me now and I wanted him bad! Me and Tommy always want bragging rights! Anyways, it wasn't meant to be – I was out of tear-offs and ended up burying the front end in a soft berm but I'll get him next time.

For those of you who couldn't make it to Hawkstone, CAS Honda is now officially Monster CAS Honda. We're running black Hondas in the British championship and I'm running the #1 plate (orders from Harry Ainsworth!) but I'm quite liking the



idea and I can't wait for Donno this weekend. I hope it ain't too windy because I wanna do some bum twitches over the finish tabletop! I might even do a Jeff Matiashevich one-hander or a quick chin grab if I get bored up there (look out for me and Tommy doing chin grabs – we're gonna start a new craze).

I can't wait for the GPs to start – tracks like Spain and Portugal are always cool road trips, everyone travels together and stays over at the campsites. Being home is normal, mundane – just a stop off while you wait for the next adventure. I'm sure I would be the same even if I didn't have motocross to take me round – I'd be wanting to see something different every week.

Sorry guys, nothing else exciting happening – just a lot of riding and training – but I'm sure I'll have something for you next time!

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